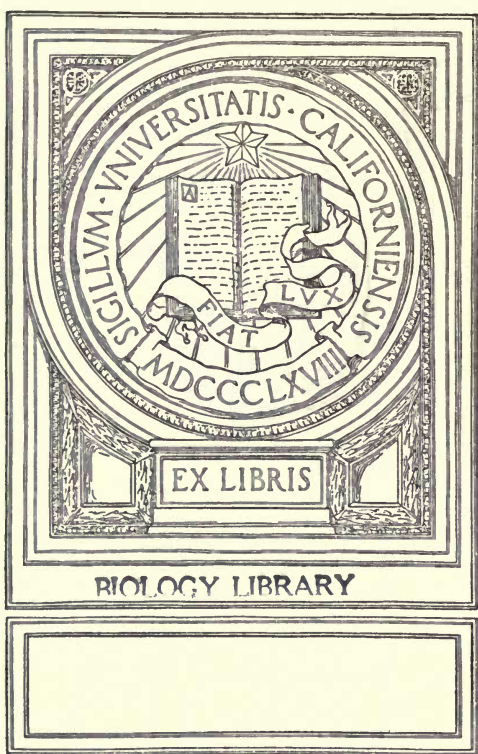


A YEAR WITH NATURE

W PERCIVAL WESTELL





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Derek P. Coth
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A YEAR WITH NATURE.



THE COMMON BUZZARD.

A YEAR WITH NATURE.

BY

W. PERCIVAL WESTELL, M.B.O.U.

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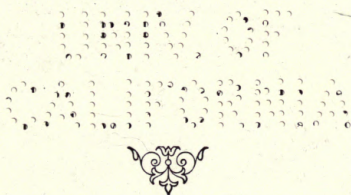
Author of "A Handbook of British Breeding Birds", etc.

*With over 170 Illustrations from Photographs taken
from Nature and Still Life*

BY

J. T. NEWMAN; G. WATMOUGH WEBSTER;
H. STONE;

AND FROM DRAWINGS BY THE AUTHOR.



LONDON:
HENRY J. DRANE,
SALISBURY HOUSE, SALISBURY SQUARE, FLEET STREET, E.C.

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TO VINDU
AIRBORNE

P R E F A C E.

IT has been my aim in the various essays included in this volume to write in as simple and unpretentious a manner as possible, and to describe—as it seemed to strike me—that which I have seen and heard in, or know of, the Natural History world.

I have not tried to cultivate any literary style or artistic merit, and it would indeed surprise me to learn that I in any way possess either of these accomplishments.

I have endeavoured to paint Nature as it is, without adding any high colours to the picture, or exaggerating the various characters displayed. Common things that are too generally overlooked in these days receive our consideration, and I hope I am right in believing that the most indifferent observer will find something of interest in the various articles and illustrations contained in this work. Sir Edward Grey once stated that he was continually hearing people say the country was dull, but he thought that if they would take notice of the things around them interest would be at once awakened, and I for one can vouchsafe that the result would be most gratifying.

To the three gentlemen who are responsible for the photographic illustrations in this volume all lovers of Nature will, I believe, feel deeply indebted. They have taken great pains with their work, and I have little doubt that their studies from Nature and Still Life will be much appreciated and admired. The photographs from Still Life by Mr. Webster are, it should be stated, from groups in the Grosvenor Museum, Chester, the painstaking and absolutely faultless work of Mr. Robert Newstead, F.E.S., the Curator.

The varying climatic conditions to which our Country is

subject make it practically impossible to set on record at a given time, and with any degree of certainty, all the sights and sounds in Nature's vast arena, and one must allow some latitude for their vagaries. And then again, on such a wide subject as Nature any work must necessarily be limited.

Many characteristics which I have included in a certain Month's essays may, for these very reasons, not be forthcoming at the time given, or even at all, but lovers of the country have the satisfaction of knowing that if Nature fails them in one direction new scenes appear of never failing interest and pleasure.

Many of the illustrations have no direct reference in the text, but this does not detract in any way from their worth as they are sufficiently true to Nature to require no comment.

The rush and tear of present day life only allows us to sip, rather than drink, at Nature's sweet fountain, but, as Longfellow says,

'If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep,
Go to the woods and hills! No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears.'

ST. ALBANS. HERTS.

W. PERCIVAL WESTELL.

August, 1900.

The Publisher has to acknowledge the courtesy of the following in allowing various articles written by the Author for the publications named, to be included, with slight revision, in this volume:—

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JANUARY.



A RURAL LANE IN WINTER.

NATURE IN JANUARY.

THE Frontispiece which graces this opening essay may, or may not, correctly represent the surroundings during the first month of the year, owing to the variation of our climate. But, as we write, the whole land is clothed in whiteness and looks most beautiful.

Snow varies, as most people know. I think there is nothing so dull and cheerless as a thawing snowfall, or even a thaw when the snow has fallen. What commends itself to me is a good dry snow, when one can get about in comparative comfort, without having to wade through a mixture of snow, mud and slush, to use a somewhat vulgar expression. At the time this sketch is being written we have a clean, dry, frosty snow, and it is delightful to ramble in the lanes and through the woods, taking notice of the Wild Life which is astir. Nothing makes one feel better in health or temper than a sharp ten miles ramble under such conditions as I have described, and only those who have participated in such walks with Nature at this season can appreciate them.

First of all let us explore in the neighbourhood of the woods and park of one of England's greatest and most respected landowners. I cannot do better than set out an actual ramble as written in my Note-book. It bears the date of January 1899 and runs as follows:—

“Before reaching the woodland glade, we rambled along the rutted roadway; it boasts of no path for it is an old country lane, on the sides of which the various bushes, such as the

Blackberry, the Hawthorn and the Furze, were covered with the beautiful crystal flakes. From one of these bushes we startled a small company of Titmice and several male Chaffinches; how beautiful is the plumage of the latter at this season.

The always welcome Robin showed off his breast of red, and now and then piped a note; the Wren, that bird in whose presence there seems to be a special friendliness, was to be seen hopping nimbly in the now destitute hedgerows, and a Wood Pigeon, or two, were sailing along over the tops of the tall Firs, which still bear the light green tassels on the terminal branches. A hen Greenfinch was greedily devouring the seeds left on a Blackberry bush by the wayside and permitted me to approach within a yard of it. I thought at first it was fatigued, but it soon showed me it still possessed the power of flight, winging its way across the waste where, at twilight, I have often watched a passing Barn Owl or heard the peculiarly jarring warble of the Nightjar. I came across four or five Sheep-folds, and listened with pleasure to the gentle lullaby produced by the tinkling of the bells.

The old shepherd was evidently too fully occupied to notice the Meadow Pipits which hereabouts are to be found, and the cheeky, inquisitive House Sparrow perched on the hurdles, did not call forth any comment from the ruddy-faced old man. His mind is fixed on the well-being of his flock, and when I saw how diligently and assiduously he looked after them, the question flitted through my mind as to whether all served their masters as well as did the shepherd.

Near one of the folds a Horse or two and half a dozen Cows were whiling away the Winter hours, but there was little for them to do excepting to eat the hay which had been strewn about for them, and, when the sun came out, to bask their dappled hides in the rays, and they evidently appreciated the warmth afforded them.

At this time of the year the noble park itself does not look at its best, yet the stone lions at the entrance gates still present a rigid stiffness, in spite of the local legend that at times they may be seen coming down from their prominent positions to feed. The lakes were frozen over, but the cold ice and snow did not seem to make any difference to the

host of Wild Fowl, who apparently enjoyed basking on the ice in the glorious sunlight. I do not remember seeing the sooty Moorhens show off their black robes to such perfection as they lazily squatted on the snow-covered banks. The proud, haughty Swans, too, were well cared for, as a portion of the ice was broken to enable them to perform their graceful natatory feats and feeding exploits.

High up in the air above me were six Wild Ducks, conspicuous by their outstretched necks. After flying round and round several times, they at last alighted on the island at the far end of the big lake, which affords them such excellent cover and concealment.

Just as I arrived at the head keeper's lodge the Deer were being fed, and what a sight it was! I counted a great many of them, but I leave the total number to my own judgment, and I do not think I am far amiss when I say they were a thousand strong.

There they were, all slowly wending their way round in a circular direction after the fallen hay as it was tossed out of a cart. What graceful animals are these, and how harmless they appear to be; even the clamorous Rooks do not mind how close they go to them, so long as they get their fill.

I had to content myself with this sight so far as the animals in the park were concerned, as a blinding snowstorm came on at this moment, and I was glad to turn my back to the storm and take the shelter offered me by a most entertaining hostess.

On my way back through the park, I was pleasingly surprised to come across twenty or thirty Red-Legged Partridges. There, under the shelter of the Evergreens they crouched down, with their heads snugly resting in their exquisite plumage. And how tame they were! Down the well-kept road through the park I saw several Peacocks and Peahens, strutting gaily along in the manner peculiar to the variety, whilst hard by the rectory, where the rector poses his theology and prepares sermons for his flock, I observed three or four Jackdaws on the fruit trees in the roomy garden.

After a good hot cup of tea, which puts new life and vigour into us, and after loading up with the fragrant weed, we again

sally forth to explore in other directions. The storm has ceased and all is still once more, save for the distant report of the sportsman's gun, which rattles through the cold, crisp air.

Walking along through the avenue of Fir trees, and now and then coming across a sturdy Beech or Elm, it was no uncommon thing to hear the laugh of the Green Woodpecker and the cry of the Jackdaw, whilst the liquid bubble of a solitary Thrush enlivened us, as also the brilliancy of the golden-red beams of the setting sun in the far West. As seen through the colonnade of tall trees it had indeed a charming effect.

It was only to be expected that we should be startled now and again by the abrupt "cock-up" of a Pheasant, but what pleased me most was the sight of a Sparrow Hawk hovering over the tops of the "giants of the forest," although those "obnoxious little creatures" which the Hawk keeps in check—the House Sparrows—were not nearly so numerous as might have been expected, probably because they had left the country side for their town vacation.

From the top of a commanding hill we had a magnificent view of the surrounding country. A very nice flock of Rooks did not escape attention, as I stood a good many hundred feet above sea-level. I say "a very nice flock" because it is such a credit to those who encourage Rookeries—and know from practical experience the good these birds do—to see our stock of Rooks gradually on the increase again. William the Fourth, if he could rise from his grave, would, I doubt not, rejoice to see that these creatures which he protected had multiplied to such a pleasing extent, and that there are now a great many who realise the usefulness of our British Birds.

The nimble Long Tailed Titmice were busy in the gardens, and the Pied Wagtail was to be seen by the brooks and rivulets on the Common, showing us that he has lost none of that attractive gait, so characteristic of this bird.

The Common Snipe is in abundance here, and so is the Woodcock. This latter bird is the largest British representative of the Snipe family. The wonderful working of Nature—the craftiness of her handiwork—is well illustrated in the Woodcock, for the bird is so suited to its manner of life and the devel-



A PAIR OF PIED WAGTAILS.

opment of its organisation. The bird well fulfils its appointed mission; with its long beak it procures worms and insects from under the ground, and those delicate bunches of nerves at the base of the beak enable it to feel them in the earth.

Then again—and especially at this season when the many-shaded coat of sober brown matches with the surroundings it frequents—when crouching low in a thicket, it is almost an impossibility to detect the bird, except for the large, dark staring eyes. Butler notices this in the lines:

‘For fools are known by looking wise,
As men find Woodcocks by their eyes.’

Rustling in amongst the leaves, I found a delicious kind of Fern now in its beauty, and, delicately treading on the many varieties of Mosses here found, a Red-Legged Partridge or two seemed to receive us as a matter of course, and yet these are classed as “Game” birds and are shot at for “Sport!”

This was the second occasion on which we encountered these beautifully plumed birds on our ramble. I have known them to place their nests on the top of a hay-stack and an old shed, as well as in a bank, or field.”

The extract from our Note-book having finished, let us discourse briefly on the general characteristics during January, other than those included in the notes given above.

A few Snowdrops are out, and some forward Crocuses peep through the snow here and there, giving a most pleasing appearance on the white ground-work.

The Fieldfares and Redwings are with us, appearing in flocks in the meadow lands. They find out the berry-bearing trees, especially the Mountain Ash, of which fruit they are very fond.

The network of the trees is more easy to follow now that the foliage is off. How delicately the twining branches overlap each other; the tree looks bare and unfruitful in the distance, but, examining closely, we find that the buds are forming and formed, only waiting for the soft sunny weather, and April showers, to throw out the green flush of Spring.

Down underneath at a good depth, the Moles and the Worms are secure from frost-bite; now and then they may come above

board to see how the weather fares, but, finding it unsuitable, they retire again to their Winter quarters.

The Snails, too, are all glued up in their shells—sleeping the Winter-sleep. During the most severe weather, the smallest bird in Europe—the Golden Crested Wren—may be seen. It is wonderful the cold this gold-crowned little creature can undergo.



THE NUTHATCH AT WORK.

It is interesting to watch the Nuthatch at work, now that the trees are leafless, and to listen to his peculiar human-like whistle.

Hanging downwards one over another, with the aid of their claws—sometimes as many as a score together—the Bats may be found in the barns in the midst of their Winter slumber.

The eggs of Moths, Butterflies, and other winged creatures

are securely secreted in all sorts of out-of-the-way places, and Nature is working slowly but surely towards the perfection which our various monthly sketches will, if followed carefully, clearly show. The glued-up crevices in which these eggs are placed is a striking example of insect intelligence.

Writing of Moths, it may be interesting to state that about two thousand different kinds are known to exist in Britain.

The Screw Moss and the Siller Cup Moss deserve special mention during the first month of the year, as they are then so beautiful.

Manure carting and distribution on the land takes place during this month, and the Mangolds and Swedes may be seen being cut up in the vicinity of the farmyard, or adjoining the Sheep-folds. Around the farmyard the Sparrows and other Finches may be seen, as well as various Buntings, including possibly our Winter visitor the Snow Bunting.

As to the flowers of January, the Gorse is often in bloom during this month, and even the Celandine may be found out in sheltered spots. This latter is commonly called the Hedge Buttercup. Others which may be looked for are the Blue Periwinkle, Shepherd's Purse, the Red Dead Nettle, Groundsel and the Chickweed. The common Polypody Fern may also be seen, as well as the Annual Meadow Grass.

The Fox carries on his depredations amongst the farmer's poultry just about now; the Polecat still exists and may perchance be met with. It supplies an interesting addition to our Fauna, as also the Stoat and the Shrew.

The Spruce Fir is a study during January, and from out of the branches we may startle a flock of Bramblings—Winter-visitors from the far North of our Island.

Gnats may be observed by the water, and, on the large sheets of water in the South, many Sea birds may be seen.

In the vicinity of some reservoirs in a Home County, I have noticed during this month such visitors as Terns, Gulls, Mergansers, Redshanks, Greenshanks, Curlews, Whimbrels, Shel-drakes, Sandpipers, Goosanders, Scoters, Shovellers, Divers, Dunlins, Gadwalls, Garganeys, Pochards, Cormorants, and many another *rara avis* which affords the Recorder to the County Natural History Society much pleasure, as such an important

addition to his list of the Avi-Fauna of the district is much prized by him.

One must not forget at this season the delicate eating Teal, the Mistle Thrush and the evergreen Holly and Ivy.

Thus closes our opening essay on Nature for the first month of the year. Its short-comings are known to us, but it is quite unpretentious, and there must be some limit, or our volume will be filled before we have reached even fair, and leafy, June.



EXTERIOR OF TRING MUSEUM.

THE MUSEUM AND ZOO AT TRING.

I AM one of the fortunate and favoured individuals who have had the honour of being personally conducted by the owner of the Museum and Zoo at Tring, almost needless to say the Hon. Walter Rothschild M.P., over the priceless Natural History Collection located in the Museum; and the animals in the grounds at this quiet secluded Hertfordshire village also claim our attention in this sketch.

Although the first month of the year, when the most hopeful of us do not expect congenial surroundings, it was a glorious morning when I alighted at Tring, the soft South-West wind being tempered with brilliant sunshine; mornings that give to this fair land of ours a beauty almost divine, and, had it been moonlight, I might have expected to see Titania and her graceful attendants sporting on the green. The sun had not long flashed its golden-red beams across the dew-spattered meadows, ere the birds broke forth in jubilant song, Blackbird, Thrush and soaring Lark; while the voices of several harbingers of Spring sounded pleasantly from a belt of woodland as I was being driven towards the park, a distance of about two miles. One could not help noting the extreme mildness of the weather. In the gardens Primroses and Violets were in bloom; Buttercups and snow-white Daisies—the flowers of our childhood—peeped out here and there in the hedgerows and fields, the golden cups harmonising to a nicety with the glorious green pastures.

One can hardly believe, when walking up the old-world High Street, that within a stone's throw almost there are Zebras and Kangaroos; Cassowaries and Great Bustards; Sacred Cattle and Emus; Pelicans and Barbary Sheep; Giant Tortoises and other various living creatures; and, contained in the Museum, what is probably the finest private Natural History Collection in the whole world.

The visitor to Tring who perchance may spend an hour or so among the inhabitants of the Zoo, or the Collection of Birds, Beasts, Fish and Insects in the Museum, cannot fail to admire the way in which everything is carried out and conducted, and the owner has apparently taken for his motto 'If anything is worth doing, it is worth doing well.' And of the genial owner himself it is barely sufficient to say that he is courteous, willing, kind, charitable and the very type of an English gentleman. I shall never forget the hearty hand-shake, the entire absence of affectation, and the goodness of my illustrious host. Small wonder is it to me that the name of Rothschild is known and admired throughout the world, and we should indeed be proud of a family which is such a credit and support to the British Empire.

Mr. Walter Rothschild has gathered together at Tring a collection of Natural History objects, which, in the future, will no doubt increase in value and appreciation, and every lover of Wild Life is indebted to this member of a great and noble family for devoting a fortune, and a lifetime, to such a pure and sensible hobby, not only to please his own tastes, but for the benefit of the Scientific World, and Natural History lovers and students generally.

To my esteemed friend Ernst Hartert—the Curator of the Museum—due credit must also be given for his directorship and management, and nothing that he can do to aid the lover of Natural History is too much for him.

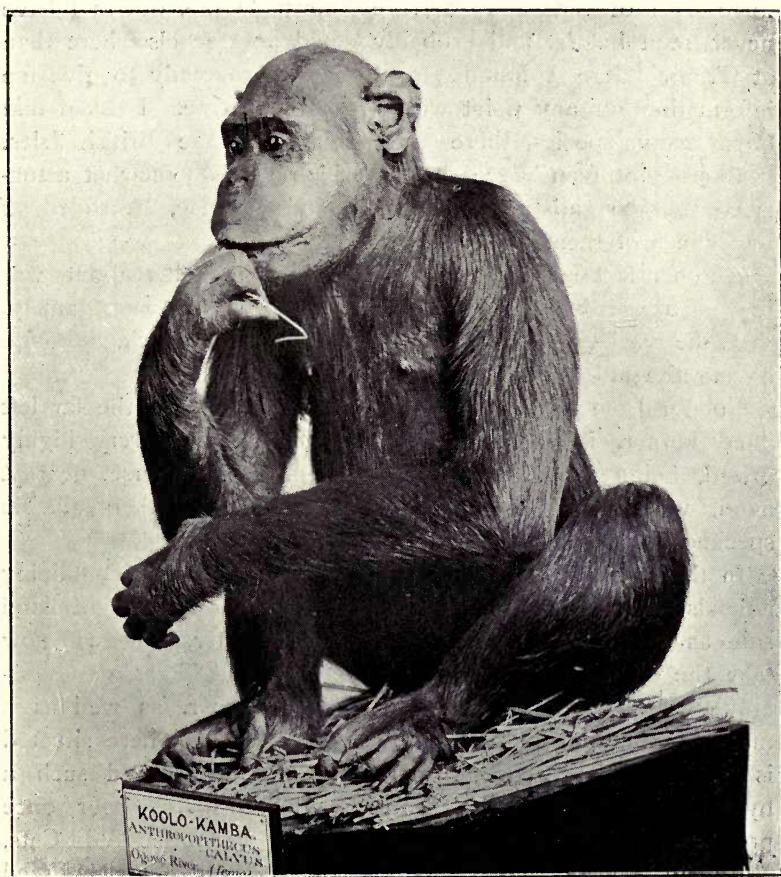
The mass of information at his, and Mr. Rothschild's, command, is wonderful, and every specimen in the collection appears to bring back to mind some interesting narrative or coincidence, which is narrated in a most charming manner to the visitor.

We at once made our way to the ground floor of the Museum, being joined in our delightful excursions by a very handsome St. Bernard dog, who seemed to evince considerable interest in our manœuvres and did not leave us for the hour we were together.

It was essential that we should have a little more light in the building, and the pressing of a button near the doorway lit up the place instantaneously with the electric light, and this

had a charming effect upon the handsome glass show-cases all around us.

In the case on the left hand side as we enter, a very fine Gorilla is presented to view. My guide informed me that it



"SALLY FROM THE ZOO," IN TRING MUSEUM.

was captured by one of the party accompanying Sir H. M Stanley on one of that well known Explorer's expeditions in Africa, and he was evidently very proud of such a fine fellow. In the next compartment a fine Ourang Outang meets the eye, and all around Apes, Monkeys and Chimpanzees by the score.

"Sally from the Zoo" is also located in this collection, and deserves special mention. Mr. Newman has given us a very true representation of "Sally" in the photograph which is here produced. What a fine study for Darwinians!

More Monkeys, Apes and such like, and we come across a huge case of Bats. A few are known to me, others I have never seen before, and probably could not see elsewhere than at Tring. Here I found Mr. Rothschild so ready to give me information on any point which occurred to me. I asked him how many species there were inhabiting the British Isles. "About seventeen", said he; at which I was somewhat astonished, but to satisfy my curiosity and surprise, he rolled off the names of them on his fingers.

Another fact which interested me very much hereabouts was the difference between the English and Irish Stoats, namely, that the variety found in the land of the Shamrock, although having the tail black, is more like a Weasel.

Not far from the Stoat, Otter and Seal cases, in the far left hand corner, is a Parti-coloured Bear which is very highly prized, being met with very infrequently. Of course, near at hand, was the Brown Bear, a Wolf, and a further valuable specimen in a Raccoon Dog.

In the centre on this floor are two huge cases, one containing animals and the other birds, whilst the one on the right hand side as we enter is also devoted to the latter. We will now take the centre case of animals. A wonderful Tiger is comfortably located on its huge paws in the corner, as well as a magnificent Lion, but the most valuable animal here situated is a Hybrid Tiger which was born in Austria, and such a hybrid has I understand only been known to occur once previously. Passing down this collection, we notice Wild Cats, Virginian Deer, Kangaroos—only nine species of which breed outside Australia—a Wild Bull and hosts of other things, and we finish up with a rather long meditative look at a Tasmanian Wolf, which has three or four broad stripes across its back very much like the marking and colour of a Perch. This Wolf, Mr. Rothschild informed me, is fast becoming extinct and increases in value as time passes.

Having gazed upon most of the animals on the ground floor, in

the limited time at disposal—excepting the Birds which we shall come to later—we ascended the stone steps to the first floor.

That which immediately attracted my attention here was a huge White Rhinoceros; it is so-called from the colour of its flesh, not as might be expected from the colour of its skin, which is the usual greyish-black colour of this beast. This specimen takes up a lot of valuable room, nevertheless it is a very priceless addition to this unique collection. Reclining not a foot away from the hind legs of the last named, are two splendid examples of fossilised Tortoises.

I also saw Antelopes, Snow Leopards, Porpoises, Whales and other denizens of the deep.

On the left hand side—in the cases running back against the wall—are Tortoises and Turtles innumerable, of all sizes, shapes and ages. At either end of this department two tremendous African Elephant's heads cannot fail to attract notice. The one near the door has gigantic tusks, and on my remarking this, my guide told me that they were abnormal ones. The same remark also applies to a large pair of Antlers suspended against a sort of balcony, towards the far end of the apartment.

All down the cases on the right is a wonderful Fish Collection. Time did not permit my noting any special rarities, but there were examples of the finny tribe such as it would be doubtful ever existed were they not here presented. Fish of all colours, shapes and sizes, and, adjoining them near the entrance door, it was very appropriate that there should be located a truly marvellous collection of Corals. As seen in their native element, they must indeed present a glittering splendour.

We pass along into an extended room containing the Zebra Collection; fine examples of these striped beasts; while situated on all fours is a Somali Ass, a much sharper looking animal than the one we are pleased to treat here in England as a beast of burden.

Facing us as we enter are some gruesome Boar specimens, which would make an individual of a nervous disposition tremble to think of meeting single-handed.

Now to the Bird Collection, and what a Collection indeed! We descend to the ground floor again, and survey the valuable

contents of the cases in the centre, and the ones running along the whole length of the right hand side walls. It would be vain for *me* to attempt to describe all I saw, and space does not permit me to do so. Eagles, Owls, Hawks, Grouse, Warblers, Tits, Buntings, Finches, Golden Orioles, Bee Eaters, Rollers, Little Auks, Gannets, Ivory Gulls, Guillemots, Terns, Geese, Ducks, Grebes, Herons, Crows, Wagtails, Woodpeckers



GREAT BUSTARDS AT TRING PARK.

and Creepers; this will give an idea of the many families of birds here gathered together.

The case of Humming Birds is indeed a study, and, when it is stated that four hundred species are known to exist on the American Continent alone, the expense and trouble to which Mr. Rothschild is put in his endeavours to obtain every variety may well be imagined.

The Albino specimens are truly marvellous, two special rarities being pointed out to me, namely, a white Waxwing and a white Great Grey Shrike. A white Black Grouse—a

very curious nomenclature—also caught my eye, and many other varieties of the feathered race which are at times found wearing a different dress than that with which Nature has for the most part adorned them.

An Emperor Penguin towered its head high above any of its fellows in the bottom of the centre case. "Its height is three feet", said my guide. Two Great Auks and an egg did not escape my attention, but these were not pointed out to me by Mr. Rothschild for the reason that he considers a great deal too much fuss has been made about this bird and its eggs, when it is borne in mind that there are many extinct birds and animals which can be purchased for a mere song, and which are much rarer than the remnants of the Great Auk.

As far as we have traversed now is what is known as the "free" part of the Museum, and I wonder what next is in store for me. "This way," says Mr. Rothschild, and we are ushered into a small room leading into a much larger one, where tier upon tier of drawers contain skins of the birds of the universe. Each drawer is of course duly labelled, and every specimen has a label attached to it giving full information respecting it. Here, is a drawer full of Birds of Paradise—they themselves being in a paradise of birds—a flood of sunlight coming in through the window having a charming effect upon their metallic hues. There, are drawers full of Gannets and Penguins, the King and the Emperor.

Tier upon tier contained the Pigeon Collection. The number astounded me, the diversity of colourings surprised me. "How many varieties are there of these birds?" I asked. "Four hundred odd," was the reply!

More Pigeons and Gannets—one hundred of which were shot by Mr. Rothschild himself before he was satisfied that he had obtained a good series—more Birds of Paradise, Penguins and other feathered beings from the four corners of the earth, and I am courteously pointed out a discovery which Mr. Rothschild, Ernst Hartert and Mr. Kleinschmidt have made with regard to there being two varieties of the Marsh Titmouse, full particulars of which are given in my "Handbook of British Breeding Birds," and it is also referred to in the "Searching for the Willow Tit" article hereafter.

I am specially shown a drawer full of Waxwings—three species of which I learn exist—and out of the two or three dozen, Mr. Rothschild picks out one having yellow on the wing in the place of the usual red wax-like substance, a truly unique occurrence.

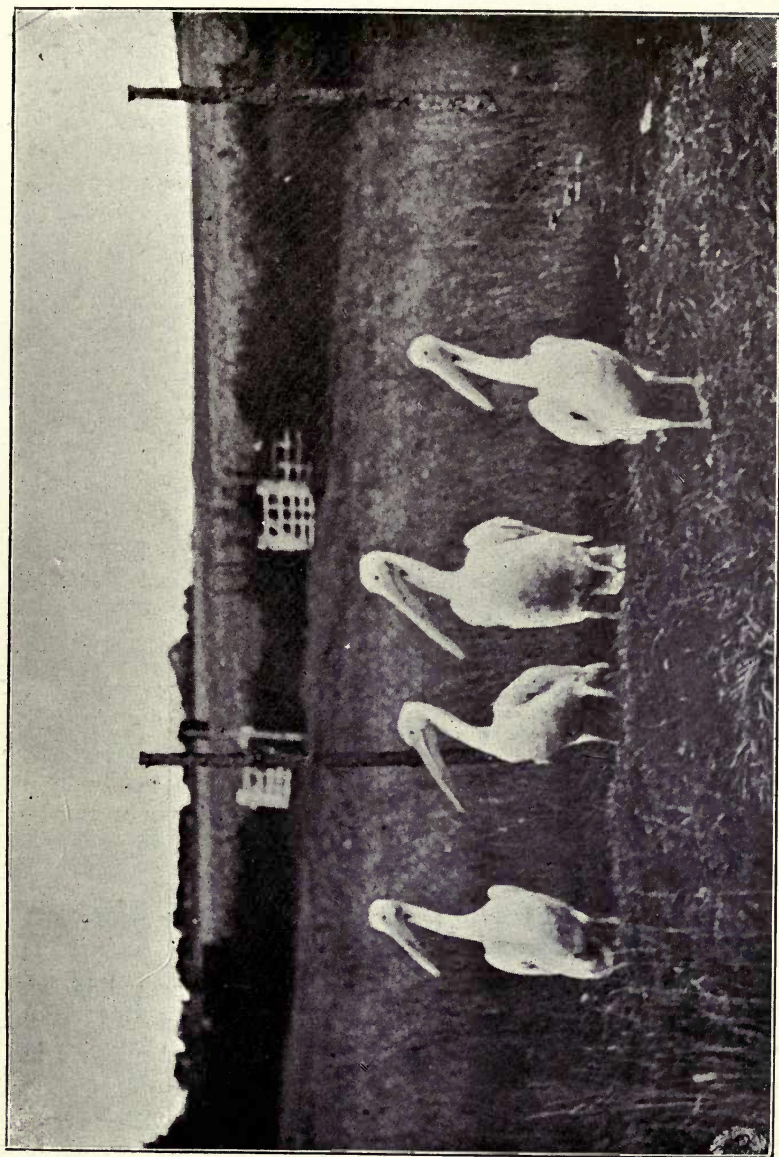
Many photographs of animals which pass the hours in the gardens and park, do not escape our attention, and we then proceed to the first floor again. Through the Library—where



KANGAROOS AT TRING PARK.

are contained thousands of volumes on Natural History in many languages, which it falls to the lot of very few people to possess—takes us to the Butterfly Collection. Butterflies of such gigantic proportions I never knew existed; I had previously only heard or read of them in some fairy tale. Drawer after drawer was exhibited, but I am not well enough versed on the subject to deal with them at any length, neither does space permit more than a passing reference.

It is truly a wonderful collection of the winged beauties of



PELICANS AT TRING PARK.

the earth, and one can well understand why the study of Natural History has engrossed the attention of some of the finest master minds the world has yet produced.

We have little space left to deal with the second part of this unique collection, properly called perhaps the Zoo, but the various photographs with which this part of my article is embellished require little, if any, explanation or comment. Here in this quiet retreat from the work-a-day world, one stumbles

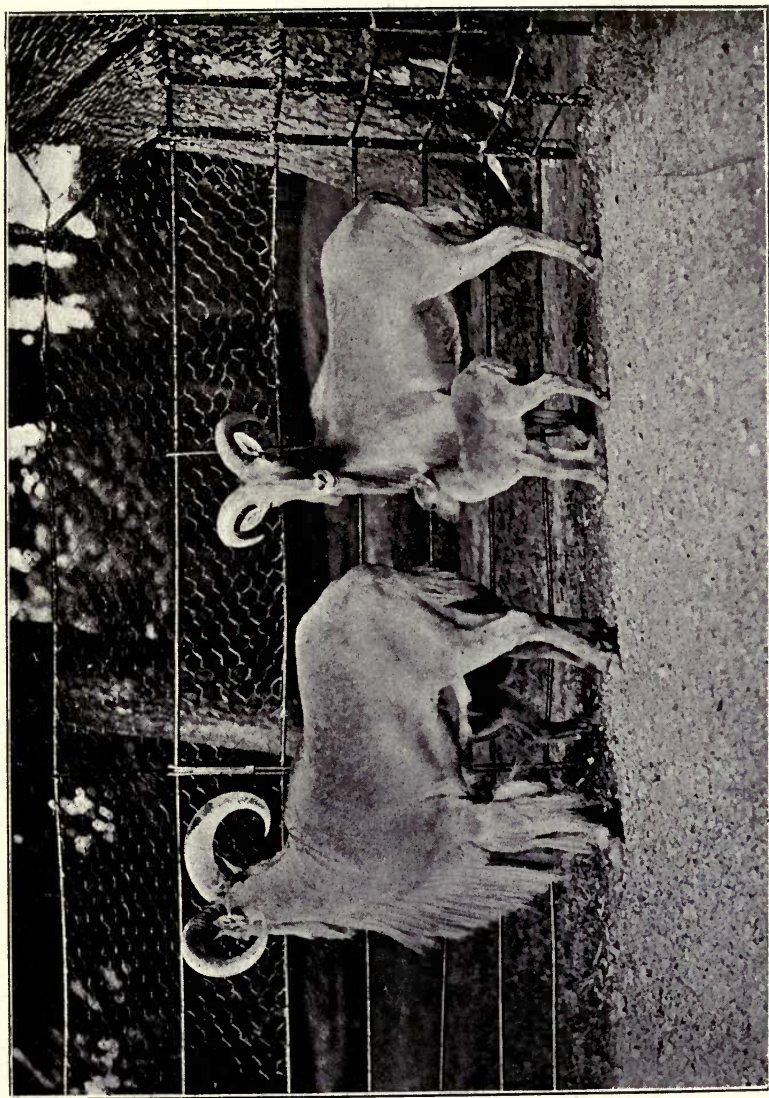


ZEBRA AT TRING PARK STABLES.

across all manner of birds and animals, representatives of many far off lands and seas.

We find our loyal and brave Australia represented in the collection by the Kangaroo, and it affords us interest and pleasure to stay awhile and watch those Colonial animals in their curious ways and mannerisms.

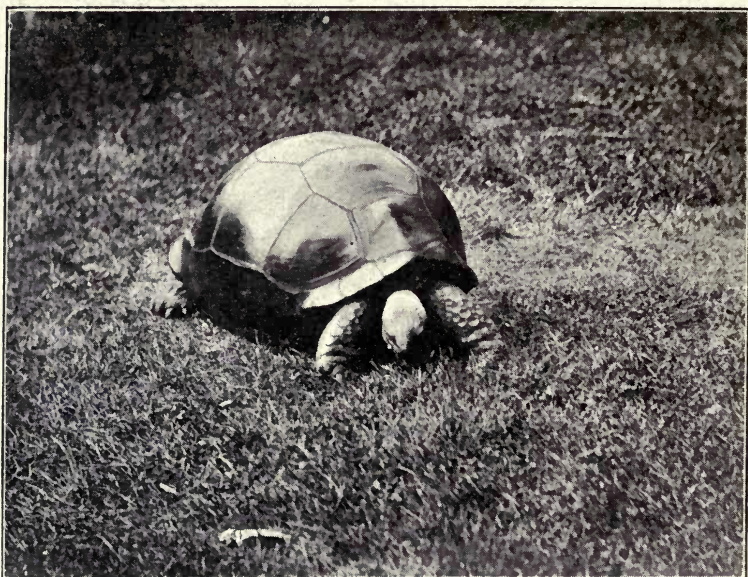
Leaving the Kangaroos, and rambling farther afield, we come across that fine bird the Great Bustard, and, as we stand admiring its beauty and attractiveness, we mourn its loss as a British Breeding Bird. How great a pity that such a bold,



BARBARY SHEEP AT TRING PARK.

grand creature—almost I believe the heaviest bird that flies—should have been lost to the Avi-Fauna of our Country. Here we have the good fortune to see the bird in a living state, but as a British Wild Bird it has gone, probably never to return.

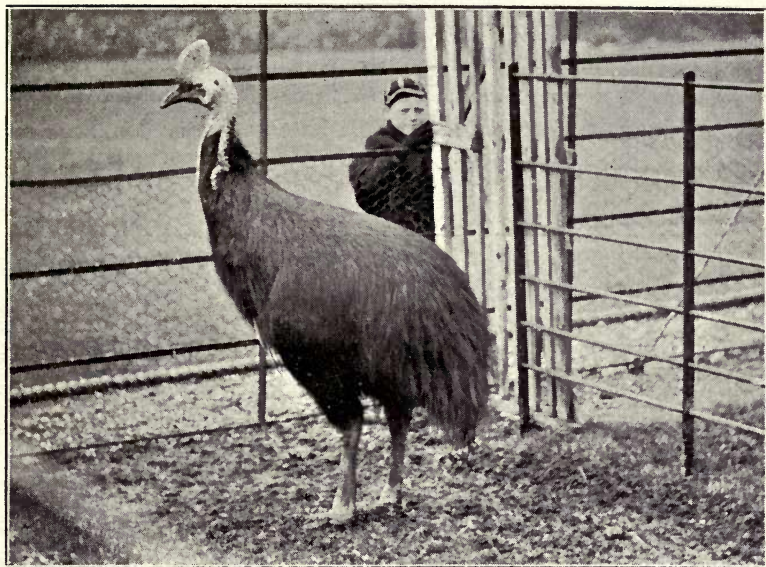
The curious Pelicans, so well known to visitors to St. James's Park, are deserving of more than ordinary notice, and their curiousness and strange antics are very realistically portrayed



GIANT TORTOISE AT TRING PARK.

in the photograph with which Mr. Newman has supplied us. In a fateful moment, just as he had got the birds in an enquiring frame of mind, the photographer pulled the trigger, I mean the shutter, and on page 21 is the result.

It is well known that Mr. Rothschild has driven with considerable success a team of Zebras, not only in the country but also in London, and it is interesting and instructive to pay a visit to the Tring Stables and see these exquisitely striped animals; they are beautifully groomed, and as clean as a new pin.

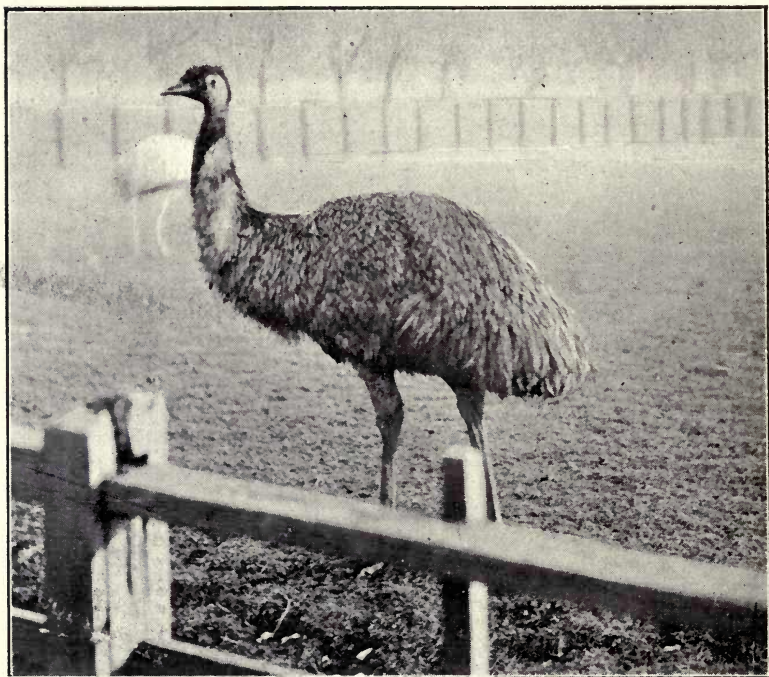


CASSOWARY AT TRING PARK.



RHEAS AT TRING PARK.

Notice how spotlessly clean the surroundings are, not only in this photograph, but in all those which are here produced. Cleanliness is a virtue we all know, or at least should do, and here at Tring it is carried out to the letter. Every comfort and care is bestowed upon these interesting and intelligent creatures,



EMUS AT TRING PARK.

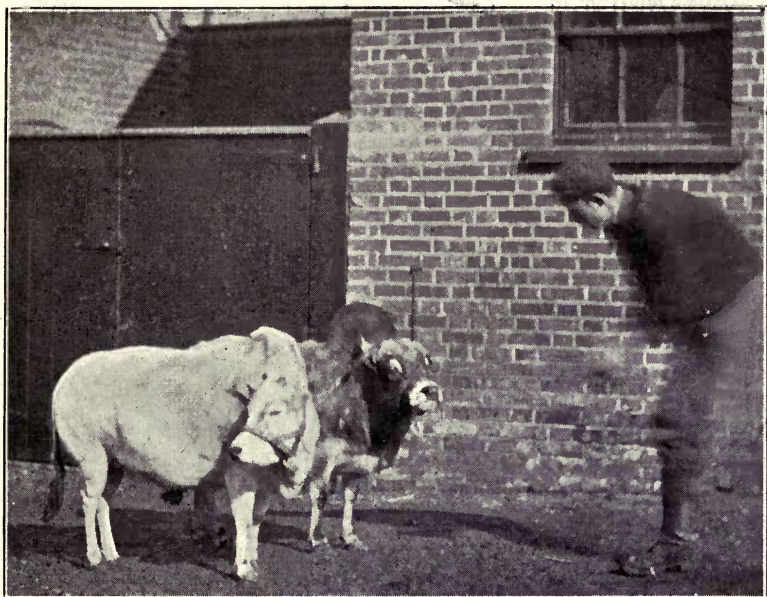
and each illustration shows the credit which is due to those responsible for the safety and well-being of this miniature Zoo.

The photograph of the Barbary Sheep is a fine study in itself, and here the reader will primarily notice how scrupulously clean are the surroundings and the animals themselves. There is a curiosity about this illustration, namely, one of the parents is looking one way, and the remaining one another. If Mr. Newman purposely tried to get the Sheep to stand in this posture so as to shew the antlers fore and aft—if I may

be allowed to use what is I believe a sea-faring term—he has succeeded excellently, but the probabilities are that it is a mere accident.

How many years old the Giant Tortoise at Tring is I cannot say, but they are known to live for hundreds of years and our old friend in the picture on page 24 is doubtless “no chicken.”

Our next visit is to see the Emus and the Cassowaries, both



SACRED CATTLE AT TRING PARK.

of which are admirably depicted in the foregoing photographs. The interested boy seen in the picture of the Cassowary looks rather small compared by the side of this wonderful feathered creature.

The Rhea birds are also deserving of notice, and the result of a successful snap-shot will be found on a previous page.

The last and concluding subject in the Zoo with which we have space to deal, is the Sacred Cattle. This is a native Bull of India; small, and remarkable for having long pendulous ears, and a fatty, elevated lump upon its withers. It is held

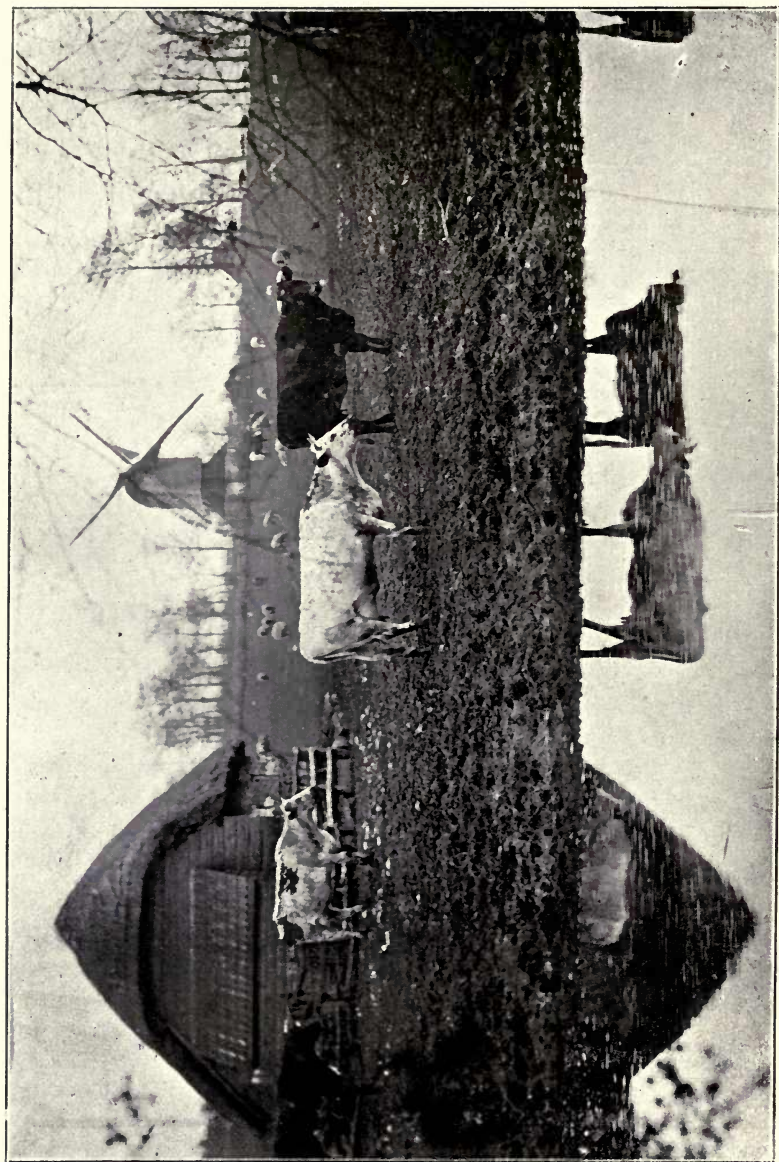
sacred by the Hindoos, but is, notwithstanding this, made to work, and when harnessed to a carriage will travel thirty miles a day.

There must necessarily be some limit to our contribution, if not, I might considerably enlarge on the Museum and the Zoo, and, after that, visit the Ornamental Waters—of which an illustration is given—and be amongst the Sheldrakes and other Wild Fowl, or go to the Lakes and watch the Grebes *dobbing* to their heart's content, but for the present at least our delightful and fascinating task is finished.



ORNAMENTAL WATERS AT TRING PARK.

FEBRUARY.



BY THE OLD MILL STREAM.

NATURE IN FEBRUARY.

AFTER the wind and rain lately experienced it was quite refreshing to take a ramble in the glorious February sunshine. On these bright sunny mornings the Beetles begin to stir about; we have seen them a foot or so down when digging in the garden this last few weeks, but now they are on top. The hedgerows are bursting into the pale green flush of Spring; the tassels of the Nut Hazel are coming along fast; they will soon be full of rich golden pollen, which the winds of March—fanned by the hand of Nature—blow into the female blossom, and fertilization is perfected.

Creeping along in the hedgerow, in amongst the twisted Honeysuckle stems, which now bear delicious green patches at the ends, the nimble little Wren may be seen preening his feathers. Who would have the heart to injure such a delicate little creature, such a harmonious songster? The English Scurvy Grass is abundant, and so is the Coltsfoot; the leaves of the latter will appear next month, but it is already well above ground. How beautiful the Kingfisher looks at this season, when Nature, more or less, is barren!

By the side of the streamlet—the waters glistening in the

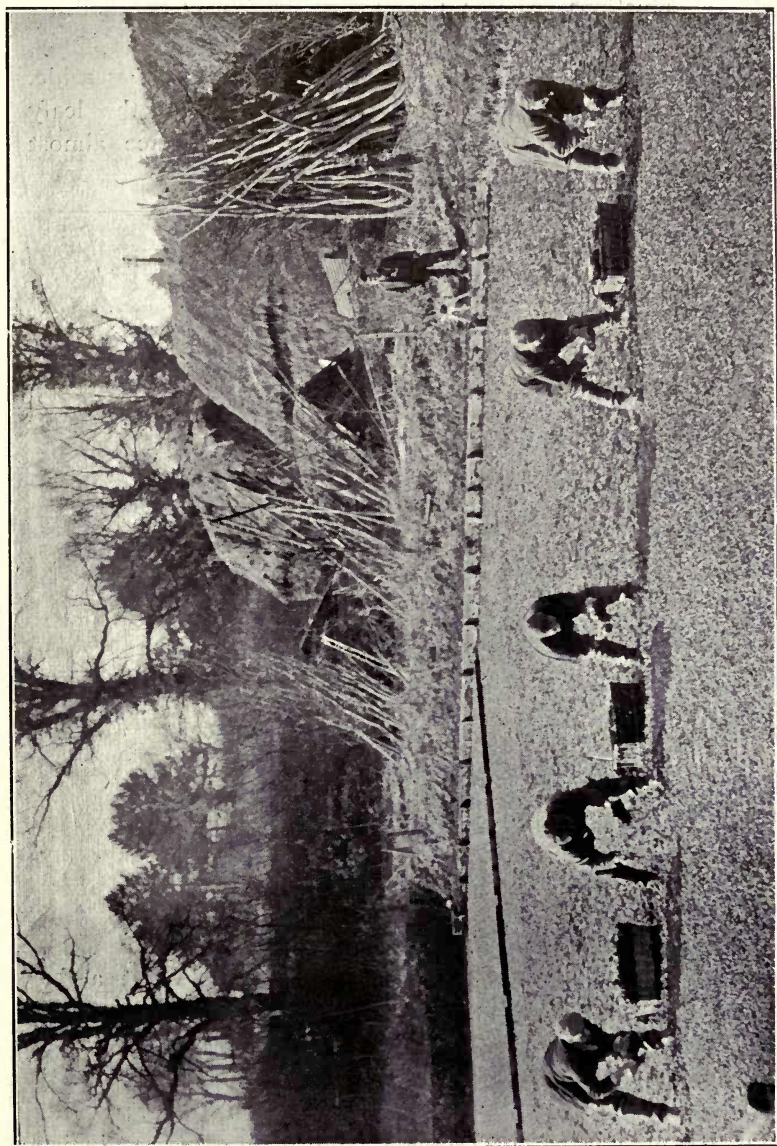
sunlight—Insects are now congregating; very small ones it is true, but all showing that the Spring is at hand. Here, perchance, we may find a Sallow tree; notice how beautifully the dark, brown-red branches are laden with buds of pure silver; nothing is more delicate at this season. It interests us to stop awhile and watch the gathering of the early crops of Watercress. How hardened to the weather the pickers are; no cold appears too biting for them as they cut and bunch the cress in the icy-cold ditches.

Of late, the weather has somewhat damped the ardour of the Skylark, but on this glorious February morn he, together with his near relation the Woodlark, trills a pleasing lay. The Robins are now in full song again, and what a number of them! As I write these lines, a little Blue Tit has taken up its station on my Victoria Plum tree. He is aiding me considerably in the destruction of some obnoxious insect, or its larvæ, which is secreted in the buds or crevices of the tree; but everyone does not look at the good birds do in the same light as the Nature lover.

The Bulbs are pushing through nicely, Violets have been out some weeks in sheltered spots, and Dandelions—the Sunflowers of the Spring as the late James Cundall used to call them—are appreciated at this time. The Celandine, too, is out; it is one of the first flowers to open its golden blossoms; the Woodruff is prized for its pale-green tints, as well as the many varieties of Ivy and the leaves of the Blackberry bushes. The Holly and the two last named, relieve the bare landscape wonderfully during the second month.

The Wood Pigeons are heard in yonder tall Fir trees. They are mated now, and perhaps building; they are early breeders. The bright sun tempts some courageous Butterfly out of its Winter retreat, probably the beautiful Brimstone variety meets our eye, and we stand spell-bound for the moment, and ejaculate, "Well! a Butterfly!" This is the season when the Tree Creeper, the Nuthatch and the Green Woodpecker are seen to advantage in the woods; beautiful indeed is their plumage against the silver and golden lichens, as they traverse the tree trunks.

The Song Thrush now pours out its fluty notes, and makes one's heart jump again at the thoughts of Springtime. Why



GATHERING WATERCRESS IN EARLY SPRING.

it is called "Song" Thrush I do not know, for it is a slight on the Mistle Thrush, which is by no means a bad singer. In sheltered situations Primroses may now be found; the delicate petals nestling on the fallen leaves of last Autumn is a study, so simple and yet so grand. As we move a few leaves aside, we scare a Rabbit, and away he scampers across the leafy pathway. The clamouring Jackdaws in the distance almost



EWES WITH TRIPLETS.

drown the early song of the Yellow Bunting. What a fine fellow he is, and how we admire him as he hops along the roadway, his green and gold plumes showing off to an extent that makes the most cultivated Naturalist exclaim, "Beautiful!"

The Rooks are busy putting their houses in order; Spring cleaning is well in hand with them, and the nests are beginning to look ship-shape, as much as they ever will do at any rate. Owing to the dry Summer of 1898, the birds devoured a great



THE OLD MILL AND WATERFALL.

many berries and few are now to be seen. What there are the Fieldfare relishes, but his companion the Redwing is a farmer's friend, feeding generally on Caterpillars and the larvæ of Beetles. The illustration on page 34 of a Ewe with triplets, photographed an hour after birth, is a striking example of how strong these animals are so soon as they are ushered into the world.

The power of the sun is increasing, but the keen wind is still piercing unless the rambler keeps on the move. Chaffinches are lively enough now, and longing for the time to commence their beautiful moss and lichen homesteads; and the voracious Greenfinch is devouring the berries of the Mountain Ash which grows by the wayside. The woodman is at work "felling and stacking"; the roadman is "ditching"; industrious individuals both of them; old and getting feeble, but two of Britain's truest sons. The Plovers are breaking up their flocks, and the cheery Hedge Sparrow—why call it "Sparrow" when such a delicate little songster?—flits along the sunlit coppice. The Squirrel may hereabouts be seen, and a Field Mouse peeps out now and again to see whether it is advisable for him to sleep a little longer or not. How lovely the various Mosses look in February; how picturesque does the Robin appear in his coat of red, as he alights on the moss-grown trunk.

In yonder tall trees one or two Magpies are disporting themselves, and a few Jays dart across in front of us. The Bullfinch does not escape attention, and what exquisite plumage he is in! His mate is hard by somewhere, as they pair for life. The rough old Starling is at the top of a Beech very happy and contented, sunning himself and chattering the while.

Climbing the walls of the thatched cottage the beautiful yellow Jessamine may now be seen in all its beauty, and in the neighbouring orchard a Goldfinch treats us to a few welcome notes. He has his eye on that old Apple tree as a suitable spot to rear his fledglings this Summer perchance, although a fluty Blackbird—he of the golden dagger—may have the same object in view; those glistening eyes tell tales. On that old stump in the distance we have had the good fortune to observe a Buzzard alight, watched its majestic flight, or the short work it makes of the tasty rodent.

On our homeward way we may see an Owl commencing its night-prowls, or meet the ruddy-faced farm labourer, bag on shoulder, trudging along whistling and singing, happy and contented. In the cottage which nestles so gently in the distance, a strapping English lass awaits him perhaps with a basin of good wholesome broth; probably that is the reason he sings the words which are wafted towards us by the soft and almost silent breezes,

‘I will come home again.’

BIRDS THAT COME IN MY GARDEN.

ON Sunday morning the 5th February 1899, we had snow in my neighbourhood for the first time this Winter, and then only a very little. It was, however, quite sufficient to induce the birds to come right up to my back door for the morsels and scraps I had placed there for them.

It was most interesting to watch them as slowly but surely each variety made its way towards my window. First, of course, came the House Sparrows tugging, fighting and scrambling. Then a little later came a Hedge Sparrow, and what a difference is perceptible in his movements to that of the House or Common Sparrow. The former is much more careful than the latter in his advances. He certainly progresses, but some movements, although progressive in a sense, are similar to those of the Cuttle-fish, namely, backwards. That is to say, he takes two steps forward perhaps, and three sideways or backwards, and then later four good long hops forward. What a gentle creature the Hedge Accentor or Warbler is, and how conscious of our protection.

Then, as if dropped from the very skies above, a little Blue Tit appeared on the snow, like a veritable jewel. How he enjoyed the meat bone I had placed for him. Of course the Robin in his breast of red was about, but he did not seem to get on very well with the Sparrows. They say that male and female Chaffinches do not associate during the Winter, but they were certainly together on the occasion referred to. What beautiful plumage the male birds are in at this season.

A sooty Blackbird or two duly made their appearance; apparently no Snails or Worms were about as the ground was hard, but they enjoyed a few scraps of some sort before departing. It was, indeed, appropriate that shortly after, a Song Thrush should come hopping right up the pathway, head well forward, eyes and ears alert. What steps he takes, too, and how quickly

he gets over the ground. A "whacking" noise tells me that he has outvied the Blackbird and actually found a Snail snugly hiding under the brick wall. See how he smashes it by the side of my rockery; if that sharp flint stone had been placed there intentionally, it could not surely have served the purpose better.

The always welcome Jenny Wren is more like a mouse than a bird as she dodges in and out of my Wallflowers and Pinks. How quick her actions, how nimble and how agile is she altogether. In among the foliage at one moment, the next running almost along the edge of the fence, then on the rails; now flitting like a lightning-flash amongst the Sparrow crowd, who are still chirruping and quarrelling as to which of them shall carry off the big hunch of bread. As a matter of fact, not one of them has the power to do it, but the Sparrow is never outdone and does not stop at trifles. Then suddenly bursts upon the ear from that delicate little male Wren, which has now made its appearance, a song truly captivating in its richness and mellowness. He seems to be cheered by the transient gleam, and sings with increased vivacity and power.

From that bubbling little throat proceeds a regular peal of bells, sweet, delicious and well sustained. Who can say that birds are not always interesting, Winter as well as Summer? They invariably possess a charm which he who has the Nature soul appreciates to the full.

Although the snow was falling, a courageous Lark was suspended in mid-heaven, pouring out its joyous, thrilling lay. What a lesson those of a morbid temperament may learn when, in the midst of gloomy surroundings and with food scarce, all these feathered creatures seem happy and contented. A near relation of the last mentioned bird takes up its station at the far end of my little plot—the Meadow Pipit to wit. There is a Sheepfold not a great distance away; here one may always look for these birds during the Winter, but I must also add it to the list of varieties which visited me. Several chattering Starlings threw off their timidity, and in their excitement and hunger came almost near enough for me to put the proverbial piece of salt on the tail. They fought like tigers for possession of the morsels thrown out for them, and woe betide the Sparrows if

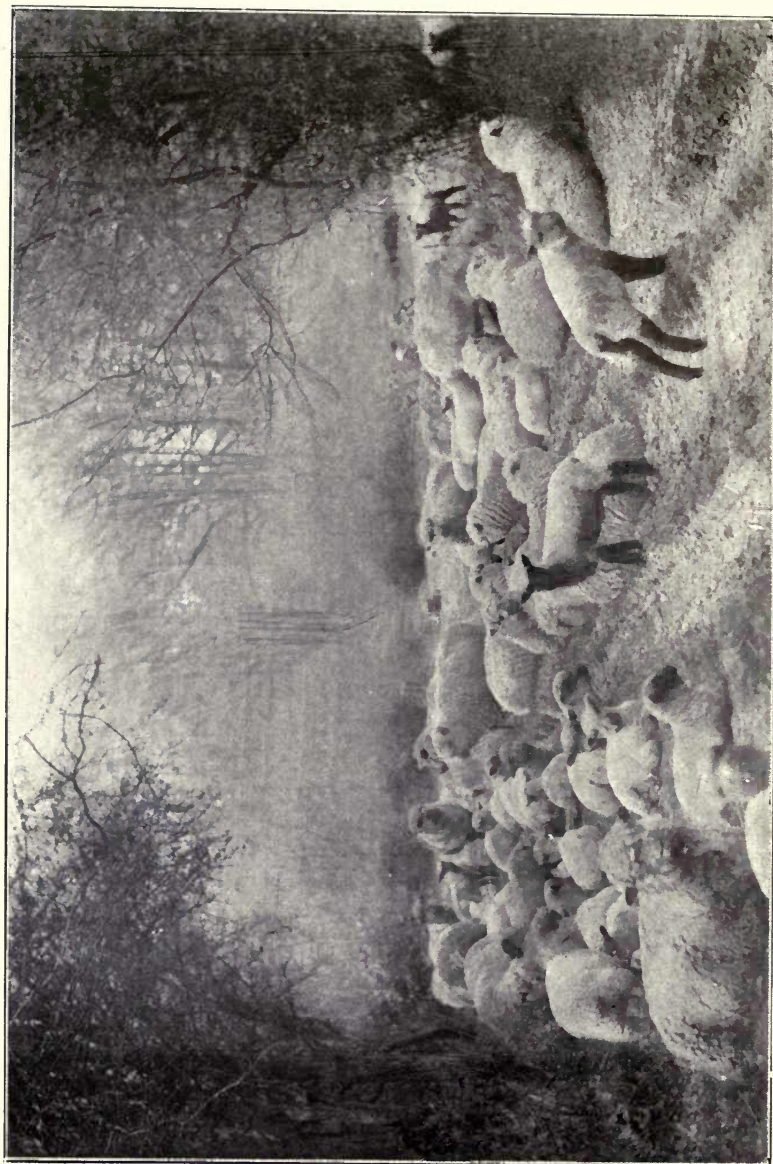
they came too near that dagger-like bill. It is mostly during hard weather that this interesting variety visits me, and the score or more which presented themselves to-day afforded me much pleasure and amusement.

A Pied Wagtail came along, too. Is he not a picture now in his black, white, and grey. This bird did not stay long, flying off to the meadows crying "tisit, tisit, tisit."

Two relations of the Blue Tit—the Great Tit and the Coal Tit—also found their way towards the meat bone later on, and lost no time in getting to work. The Mistle Thrush was good enough to stop for a moment or two on his journey towards the Mountain Ash tree, the berries of which he has partaken of many a time this last few weeks.

Even a couple of old Rooks paid me a visit to see what was about, and started "dibbing" operations, but I am sorely afraid all to no purpose, for they quickly changed their quarters and alighted on the ploughed land in the distance, where in the well-furrowed lines they were probably more successful.

MARCH.



A REST BY THE WAYSIDE.

NATURE IN MARCH.

I.

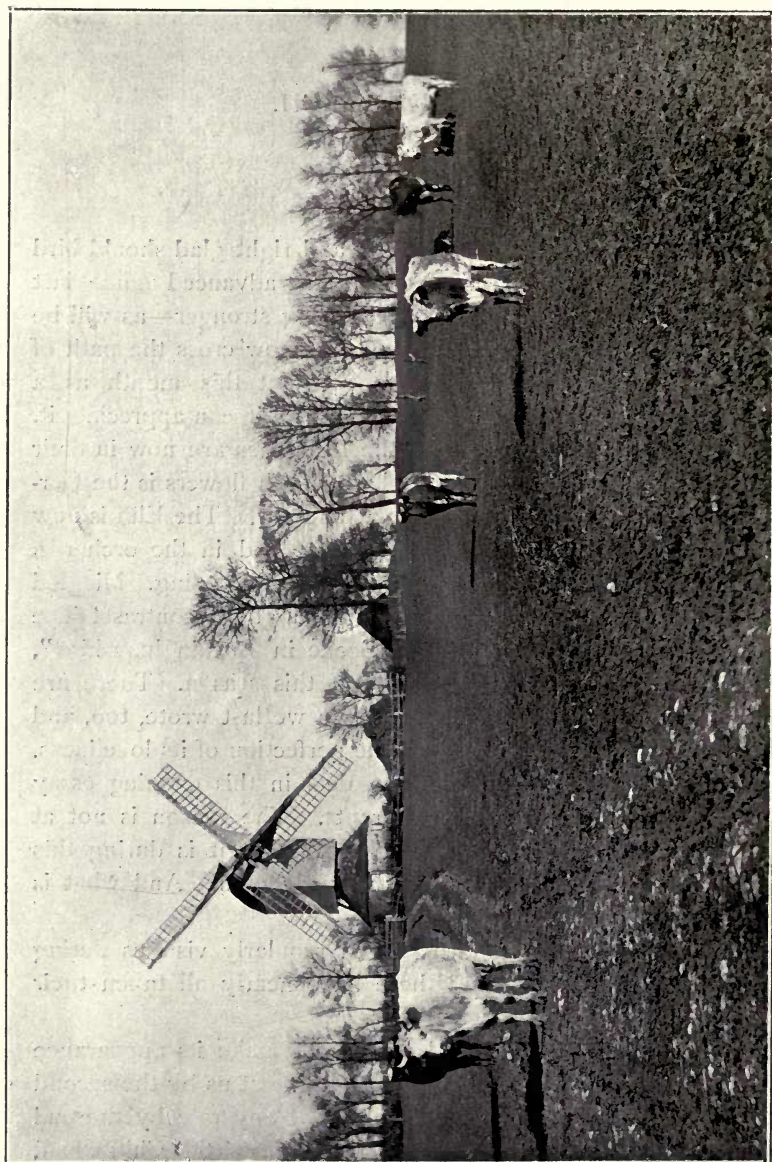
THIS is the first month of Spring, and right glad should bird lovers be that it is here. Nature has advanced since last month; the early young Lambs are getting stronger—as will be seen from our frontispiece—and the Ants now cross the path of the wayfarer. Nothing sounds so pleasant this month as a Linnet chorus; only those who have heard it can appreciate it.

This is the Violet season, and the Primroses are now in their prime. One of the most beautiful of March flowers is the German Speedwell—it is as blue as a June sky. The Elm is now covered with tufts of deep-red blossom, and in the orchards, fields and gardens giant golden Daffodils are blooming. Mingled with the glorious green grass, what a delightful contrast! The photograph of "Early Spring, a Scene in Buckinghamshire", admirably portrays the surroundings at this season. There are more nests in secluded spots than when we last wrote, too, and all Nature is progressing towards the perfection of its loveliness.

Perhaps it would be as well to deal in this opening essay for March with our Summer Migrants. The season is not at all inopportune when it is borne in mind that it is during this month that the first visitors reach our shores. And what is more interesting?

There are about forty birds which regularly visit us during the Spring and Summer, and these have nearly all taken their departure by the end of September.

One of the earliest feathered visitors to make its appearance here is the Wheatear. It is generally amongst us by the second week in March. About this time also—at any rate by the end of the month—I have often observed and heard the Chiff Chaff, the Greater and Lesser Whitethroats, the Willow Wren, and the Wood Wren, although the birds last enumerated—with the



EARLY SPRING: A SCENE IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

exception perhaps of the Wheatear and the Chiff Chaff—generally appear early in April.

Many migrants vary a great deal as to the date they arrive, and the forwardness or backwardness of the season seems to affect their coming. I have heard the Stone Curlew in March, April, and May for the first time; the latter month may be generally accepted as the more usual time for its arrival. It is said that a few of these birds remain with us the whole year through.

With the advent of glorious April, when the hedgerows are bursting forth in all their pristine beauty and splendour, and more wild flowers garnish the country side, the climax is reached. It is early in this month that the Sand Martin reaches us, and it is interesting to note that this useful little bird—the smallest of the Swallow tribe—usually precedes by a few days the Swallow and the House Martin.

The Cuckoo comes in April, and I always have my suspicions that the early birds we hear so much about are Cuckoo clocks or ploughboys. The Redstart—called in many localities the Firetail because of its beautiful flame-coloured tail feathers—also reaches us during the fourth month, and the same may be said of the Grasshopper Warbler, the Whinchat, the Blackcap—considered by some Naturalists little inferior to the Nightingale in song—the Nightingale—the males of the latter arriving about ten days before the females—and the Wryneck. I should have placed this bird before the Cuckoo, for the reason that it has acquired the name of “Cuckoo’s Mate” or “Messenger,” inasmuch as it is usually amongst us a little previous to that bird.

The beautiful Tree Pipit also arrives in April, and if you

‘Know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,’

there, if there are trees hard by, you will very probably meet with this bird for the first time.

The Common Sandpiper, Corncrake, Spotted Crake, Ring Ouzel, Hobby Falcon, Kentish Plover, Red Backed Shrike—better known in the country as the Butcher Bird—Sedge Warbler, Garden Warbler, Reed Warbler, Turtle Dove and Yellow Wagtail, all find their way to the British Isles during April.

In May there arrives the Spotted Flycatcher, the Quail, the Stone Curlew—already referred to—and amongst the last which favour us with their welcome presence are the Pied Flycatcher—not by any means so common a variety as the Spotted—the Swift—one of the latest to arrive and one of the first to depart—and the interesting and useful Nightjar.

The Marsh Warbler may now be classed as a regular migrant to this Country, and it is pleasing to record the fact that it is on the increase. About the 20th of May it makes its appearance.

The beautiful Golden Oriole is said to be a regular Spring migrant to Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, and the strikingly picturesque Hoopoe also visits us, perhaps regularly. Both birds are persecuted, and owing to their exquisite and attractive plumage do not fail to arrest attention; this being so, they are shot more often than if they were unattractive in their appearance.

To make this sketch complete, it is as well in conclusion to set out those birds which visit us occasionally during the Spring and Summer, but which cannot be classed in any way as regular migrants. These are:—Orphean Warbler, Savi's Warbler, Aquatic Warbler, Great Reed Warbler, Rufous Warbler, White Wagtail, Grey Headed Wagtail, Water Pipit, Richard's Pipit, Tawny Pipit, Pennsylvanian Pipit, Red Throated Pipit, and the Alpine Swift.

NATURE IN MARCH.

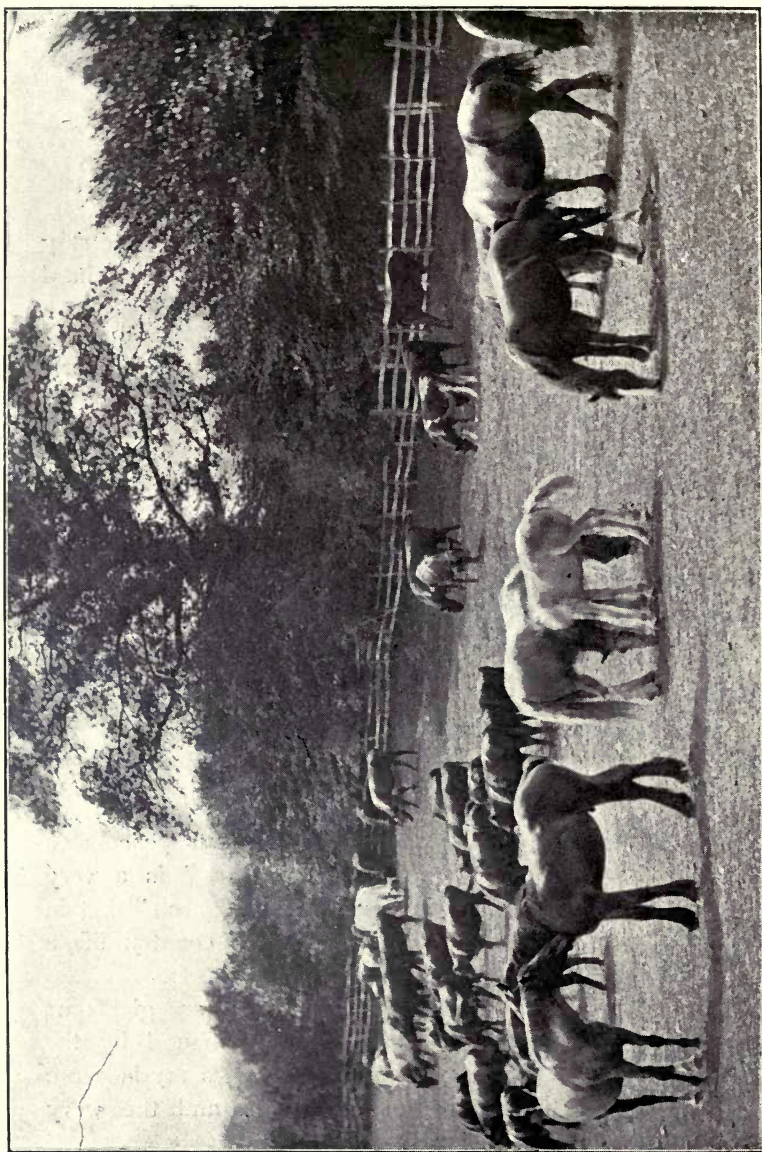
II.

THOSE of us whose means and avocations compel us to stay in this fair land of ours, are beginning to forget what a hard Winter really is, although we must not be too confident even yet that the wintry blast will not overtake us, and we find ourselves amidst snow and ice at Eastertide. But the more hopeful of us are trusting that such will not be the case.

Nothing appears to be such a drawback to the progress of nidification as congenial surroundings followed by hard weather. The whole of the feathered race seem to resent such climatic changes very much, and all bird life appears to suffer from an attack of melancholia. What a change comes over the scene, however, when we have Spring-like weather at its due date! Animal life is to all intents and purposes pleased and gratified; the Bees at once commence their innocent and useful work all in good faith and patient endurance. How pleasant it is, when the time arrives, to stand beneath the branches listening to the soft, sweet monotone, and watching the fragrant buds and petals as they flutter to the ground like flakes of snow, demonstrating forcibly to us that the wonderful process of fertilization has been perfected. "Out to Grass" is a very appropriate scene for insertion in a "Nature in March" sketch, and will illustrate to those unacquainted with country life a picturesque March study.

Even the Water Rats by the bubbling rivulet are gladsome and playful, as they squat upon the mouldy mound by the side, basking in the sunlight; Insects in countless myriads are already buzzing on the surface of the water, and the wary Trout is on the look-out.

Near this spot we notice the Kingfisher—probably the most gaudily-attired of the British Birds now left to us—darting with



OUT TO GRASS.

lightning rapidity over the water, and frightening the shoals of silvery Minnows as it darts past.

The budding hedgerows will soon be bursting into their glorious new green foliage; the Honeysuckle, with its rustic brown stalks, is pleasingly contrasted with its tassels of green.

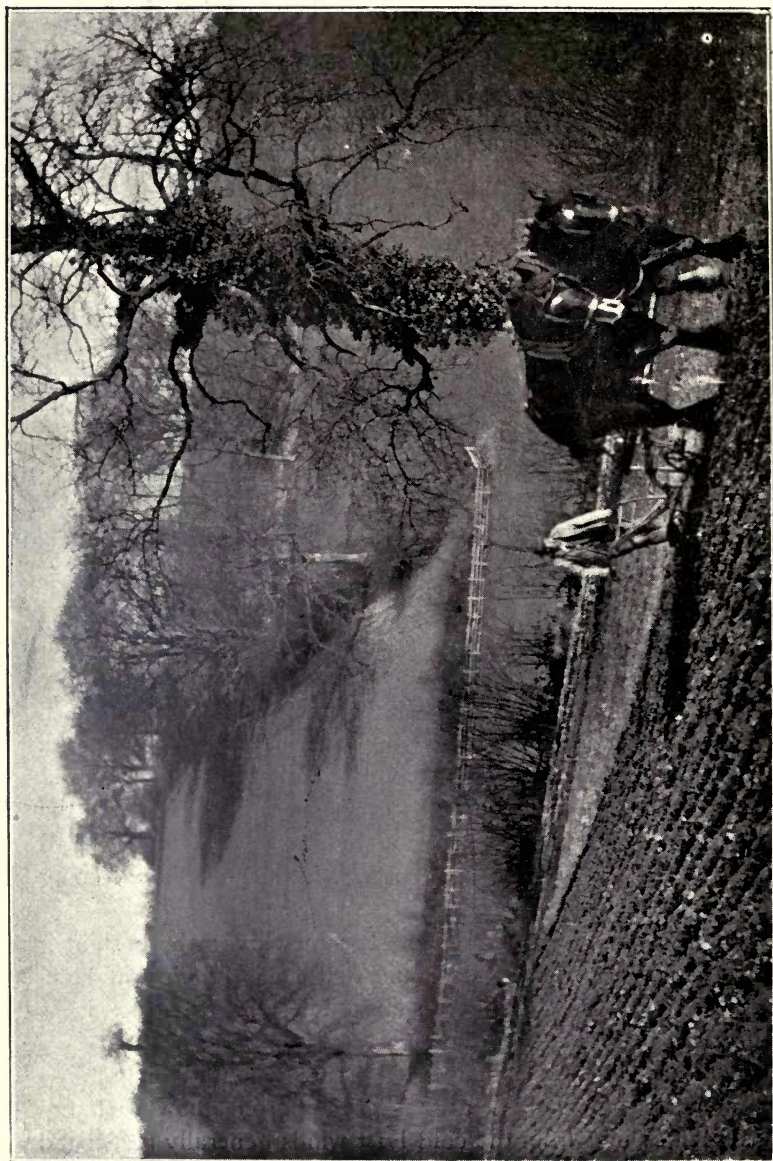
The Corn is well up, and in the next field the rich, brown soil has a very charming effect, which is enhanced by the colonnade of fine trees in the distance. Spring ploughing, which Mr. Newman has so excellently illustrated, is still taking place, and it is interesting to stand at the end of the last turned-up furrow and watch the ploughman start on a fresh line. Watch how straight he goes, and how accustomed he has become to the rough ground he has to traverse. He hardly ever seems to stumble over the rough up-turned clods of earth.

Bird life is very apparent; all Nature seems glad. The Skylark—that minstrel of liberty and love—is towering up towards the clouds; a few Starlings flit by at a tremendous speed; some of them are already paired off, others appear to be in a gregarious state all the year round.

The bird which is so conscious of protection—the Wren—is one that never appears to be of a melancholy disposition; on a Winter's morning he seems to be cheered by the transient gleam; on a Spring morning one finds him in the same happy mood. And what a delicate little songster he is! His matin often reminds me of the Tree Pipit's, but on a lower scale. How nimbly he hops along the bottom of the hedgerow, and how busy he is. Here, there and everywhere is the bird; in the hedgerow, on the ivy grown wall, in the garden, or, perched on the branch of some sturdy beech, he sings of the coming Spring.

The Robin has evidently a nest somewhere; those shining eyes and artful movements tell me that he is playing at hide-and-seek; then, when danger is past, he signals his happiness by uttering an anthem of praise.

The Merle and Mavis have long since thought of building their homestead; young Thrushes are reported; how sheltered are these fledglings from the cold East winds generally associated with early Spring, in the well-built nest with the cow-dung lining. Mr. Newman was fortunate enough to obtain a very



SPRING PLOUGHING.

exquisite picture of an early nest of the Song Thrush which was placed in a basket; a more comfortable dwelling could not be desired.

The silver Sallow blossoms will soon burst out into gold, assuring us that Eastertide is rapidly approaching. In the pond by the wayside the Ducks and Geese are performing their graceful natatory feats. A few Dorkings, and a giant Minorca cock are grubbing and scratching at the edge of the pool, and the Pied Wagtail searches near by for insects and their larvæ.

Ring Doves are gently cooing in the coppice yonder, which monotone, mingled with the alarm cry of the artful, darting Jay, and the cawing of busy Rooks, is to say the least curious. The Rooks have young; the Rookery is alive with them, and how thankful the farmer should be for a further stock of these useful birds.

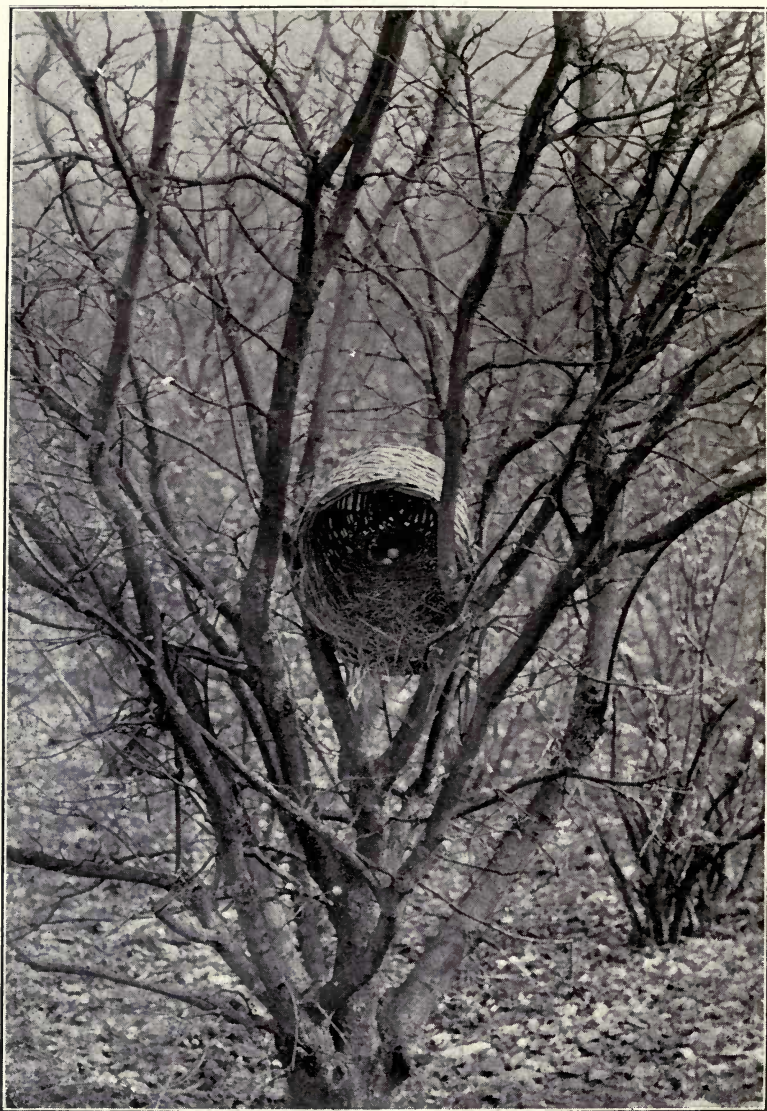
Lapwings—already paired off—are flying by odd gesticulations over the fallows; the Golden Plover is still in flocks, but the Chaffinch has paired, and the shrill ‘pink-pink’ makes one peep into the hedgerow and the bramble-bush on the chance of finding the moss and lichen cup.

Through a green lane—on either side of us is a well-wooded coppice—we hear a gentle tapping. A Woodpecker, no, a Tit on an oak diligently searching for the highly prized and luscious insect. The Titmice are a most useful race, but even in this enlightened age we have to lecture and preach to gardeners and landowners as to the good birds do, and the protection they need.

These old fashioned green lanes are slowly giving place to bricks and mortar. Where in our childhood was a gipsy encampment, with all the rural surroundings, is now the house and grounds of some City magnate. To the lover of Nature, all this is disheartening and depressing.

The Rabbits disport themselves very freely by the side of the wood, but are soon off into their runs when the hands are clapped, a proceeding which also disturbs a Tree Creeper who pokes his head round the corner of the tree to see who is about. Not for all Klondike’s gold would a true Naturalist molest or harm this insectivorous little creature.

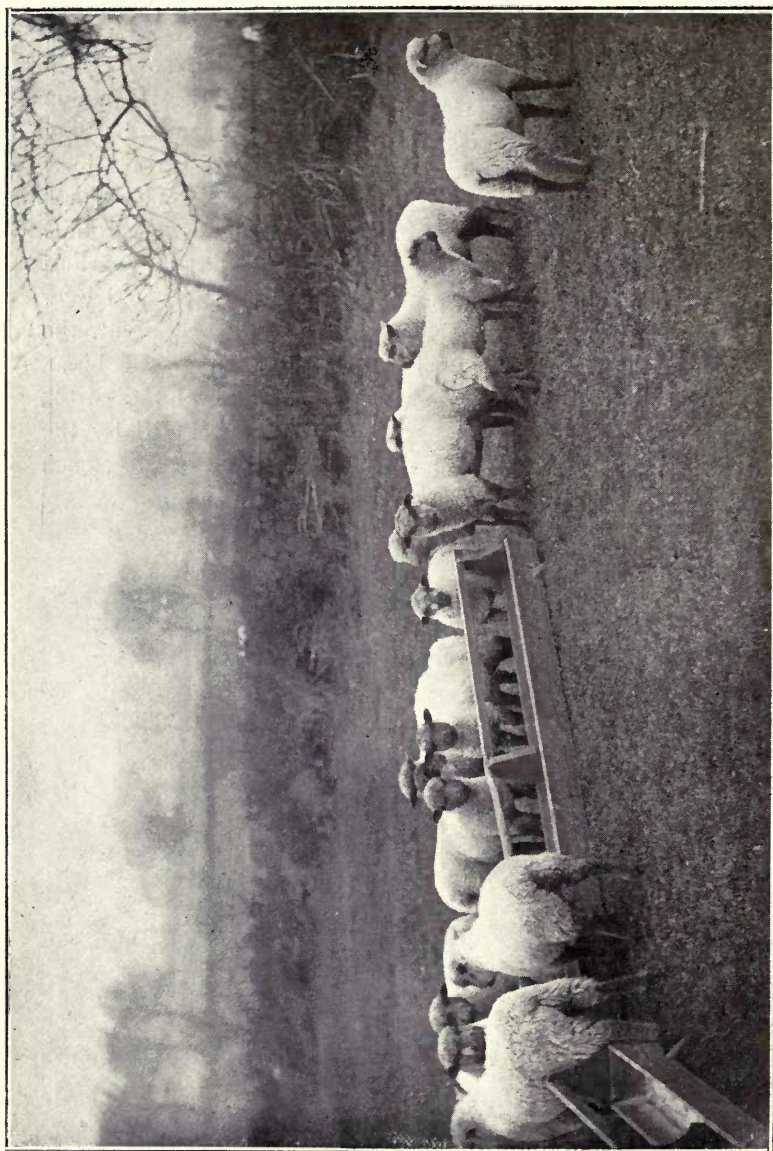
There are not a great variety of birds inland just now, but



EARLY NEST AND EGGS OF SONG THRUSH IN A BASKET.

the nimble little Chiff Chaff should be here shortly. I heard it on the 14th last year. The Willow Wren and the Whitethroats will not be a great while behind, and a stray Swallow or Martin will soon be chronicled.

Glorious indeed is a Spring morning—everything so fresh in the new mantles of beauty, and what a sight the flowers in the cottage gardens! White and Blue Violets are battling against the Snowdrops and Polyanthus; Oxlips of various hues are intermingled with Primroses and Daisies; golden Crocuses make love to the sweet-smelling Hyacinths; the yellow Jessamine harmonises in the truest sense of the word with the various streaked Ivy, so beautifully trained against the wall and over the old thatched roof. All this, and the glorious sunlight, the clear blue sky; Nature in verdure clad, the songs of birds, the pleasing monotone of the winged creatures of the earth; the neighing of a horse, the gentle lullaby produced by the tinkling of sheep-bells, the bark of a distant watch-dog; such are some of the sights and sounds on a Spring morning.



OXFORD DOWN LAMBS.

WHERE OUR SUMMER MIGRANTS SPEND THE WINTER.

THE season for the arrival of the birds which charm us with their presence during the Summer will soon be here, and it is especially interesting just now to notice where these varieties pass the Winter months. There are many people who never think fit to enquire where our feathered friends wing their way to as September draws near, and yet they often wonder where they do go to, and know full well that they do leave us, the theory or belief in Gilbert White's day that they hybernated in the holes of rocks and caves, having been by this time entirely exploded. Surely it is one of the most marvellous traits in a bird's character—these migration mysteries and movements—and one that is well worth pursuing closely. Taking what I consider to be the regular Summer visitors, and ranging them somewhat in the order in which they appear on our shores, let us see from whence these feathered creatures have come, where they have been for the past six months or so, and whither, when September comes round again, and before then in some instances, they will be going.

Africa and India are the Winter quarters of the beautiful Spotted Crake, whilst the Ring Ouzel, or Moor Blackbird, is found at that season in Northern and Central Africa and Asia Minor. The Wheatear ranges in Winter from Western and Northern Africa to Persia and Northern India, a more extensive range than the two last named varieties. Temperate Europe, Northern Africa and South-Western Asia claim the Stone Curlew, or Norfolk Plover, during the time we are mourning its loss, although a few individuals are stated to be found with us throughout the year. The delicate little Chiff Chaff—the Herald of Spring—spends the Winter on the shores of the Mediterranean, and the Yellow Wagtail brings us back to Africa again. The Swallow tribe are generally regarded as Africans during the English Winter, but they have a much wider distribution, as the Sand Martin is found in India, Africa, and South America; the Swallow passes the Winter in Ethiopia and India, and the House

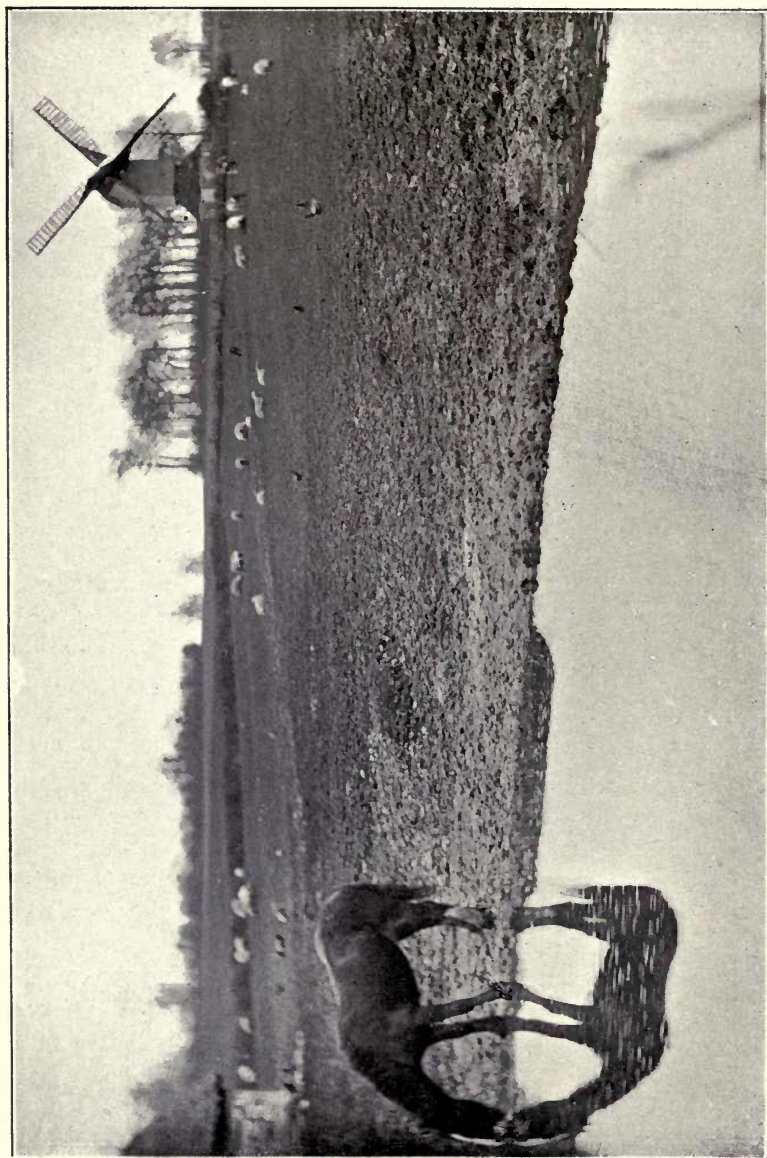
Martin is found south of Abyssinia. That interesting bird the Redstart, or Firetail, migrates in Autumn through Southern Europe to Northern Africa, and the Grasshopper Warbler—an extensive family of visitants are the Warblers—also goes to Northern Africa, and it is said to Southern Europe. Northern Africa also claims the Whinchat, and the same may be said of the Blackcap, with the addition of Southern Europe.

Our charming Nightingale wings its way to Africa, and so does the beautiful Hobby Falcon, but he also winters in India. China as well as Northern Africa and India, claims the Wryneck, or Cuckoo's Mate, and the Cuckoo spends the Winter months in Central Africa and Southern India. That melodious trilling songster the Tree Pipit, is found in Winter in Africa, Persia and India, and the Common Sandpiper in Africa. Africa generally is the home of the Lesser Whitethroat, but Southern Africa that of the Greater variety. The Willow Warbler visits Africa and Persia, and the Kentish Plover goes to Africa, India and Southern China.

Egypt, Algeria, Asia Minor and Palestine are the Countries which the Corn Crake, or Landrail, visits during its absence from the British Isles, and the Red Backed Shrike is content with Africa only. The mimicing Sedge Warbler flits off to Northern Africa and Asia Minor, whilst four other Warblers—the Garden, Reed, Marsh and beautiful Wood Warbler—all go to Africa. The Quail inhabits Egypt and Northern Africa during Winter. The amorous Turtle Dove, of which bird so much has been written and sung, goes to Northern Africa, Egypt and Nubia, whilst the Swift is found in Africa. That Country also claims the Spotted and Pied Flycatchers. Lastly, that interesting and extremely useful bird the Nightjar, passes the Winter in India and Africa.

In such a sketch as this I might enlarge, and deal with irregular Migrants, such as the attractive Hoopoe, Golden Oriole and many others, but to deal with those which may safely be classed as regular visitors is all-sufficient for the present occasion.

APRIL.



A MORNING DRAUGHT.

NATURE IN APRIL.

I.

THE advent of April is welcome—more especially so because of the Summer visitors which arrive during the month. I heard the delicate little Chiff Chaff on the 2nd, but it was reported some days previously. How glorious is an April morn when ushered in by warm, sunny weather, and things in the garden are all astir. The Oak, Ash, and Chestnut are bursting, together with the Sycamore. The Blackthorn is in bloom, and the Hawthorn is fully green in sheltered spots, and will be in fairest verdure clad before the month is out.

This is the season of the Almond blossom, which appears before the leaves. Was ever anything more beautiful than the pink and white blossoms which toss to and fro in the gentle breezes, like so many Butterflies toying in the air? Was ever the Chaffinch in more exquisite plumage than at this season? I found a finished nest on April 2nd, but it was in a most exposed situation, and stood a poor chance of success I am afraid. The beautiful nest of this bird, so clearly defined in our illustration, is a Nature Study in itself. How pleasant to watch the Nuthatch just now, as he scampers round and round the trunks and branches, and, hard by, to listen to the “cheep,



NEST AND EGGS OF CHAFFINCH.

cheep," of the Tree Creeper and his little *song*—in spite of what some Naturalists say to the contrary! He *does sing*, for I have heard him.

Walking along, we notice the blossoms of the Nut Hazel, male and female; our old friend who is with us pulls down a few stems and tells us it will be a good Nut year. Swinging to and fro on one of the stems, the Greenfinch may now be seen preening his feathers and pouring out his not unpleasant song; indeed, I have heard him sing excellently at times. One is struck at the abundance of Larks and Robins. I heard the Skylark singing at *midnight* on the 30th March on three separate occasions, and apparently soaring too! Did ever the trilling lay sound so beautiful as on an April morn? Passing across some pasture land, we notice two or three Mushroom rings; note a small flock of Starlings not yet mated, and distinctly hear in yonder Firs, for the first time, the Chiff Chaff.

We regret that Goldfinches are not met with so frequently as we should like, although I know of a certain district where they are increasing. On the stubbles we put up a few Linnets, and a couple of old Carrion Crows fly past overhead.

In the ditches the Frogs are about, and on warm evenings one may hear their love song. In the pools the Toads are spawning, and, as we stand watching them, a Swan gracefully glides towards us—the snow-white feathers and the exquisite attitudes of the bird reminding us of one Doré's angels. The Bees are busy now, and we note the first Humble Bee we have seen out.

How the Bees find the Sallow trees away in the woods; they have come miles to fetch the nectar. How sweet-smelling is the male blossom, each little stem laden with gold. Notice the *female* palm hard by. The uneducated person passes it and remarks, "It isn't out"—but it never will be any more than it is.

In the woods we pick up the wing of a Jay; the keeper has been blowing about for the want of something better to do, but there is no doubt these birds do interfere with the Game.

We may perchance pick up a dead bird or two by the wayside, probably killed by the boy with the catapult. How charming the golden of the Furze during April, on the top of

which the Wheatear or the Whinchat may be seen. The Beetles are about now, Cowslips will be out towards the end of the month, the Wild Hyacinths are coming forward post-haste, and the flowers of the Cuckoo Pint are fast approaching maturity.

Passing down a drive, we see that the Rhododendrons are budded, and the Wild Currant is in bloom; through the tall trees comes the bell-ringing notes of the Great Tit, and the notes of the Coal, Marsh, Blue and Long Tailed varieties. We meet the cowman who tells his dog to "fetch 'em up," and the animal instinctively obeys him. In the orchards the fruit trees are in blossom and, nestling underneath, giant Daffodils are still blooming. In the hedgerow we notice the run of a Hare, and see that the Moles have been busy burrowing and casting up. On that old Privet hedge the Bullfinch may be seen; he is very fond of the berries. Wallflowers are blooming, and the flower of the Lilac may be seen.

The Rooks still carry a stray stick to their homesteads. Some of the birds are seen on the ploughed land; they may be after the wireworm or the newly-sown seed. The man from the crowded city goes by and observes to his companion, "What a lot of *Crows* there are in the *Rookery*!" The Hedge Sparrow enlivens us with his pretty little warble, and the Wren is singing for all he is worth.

The Oats and Barley are well through early in the month, and by the old sand-pit we have pleasure in noticing the first Sand Martins a little later on.

How sweet the aroma from the White Violets, and how glad Nature seems at her new lease of life. We write this early, but before the month is out the plaintive call of "Cuckoo" will be heard, the Tree Pipit will be pouring out its joyous notes, the two Whitethroats will be seen and heard, and the Swallow skimming over the pool, or across the golden-spangled meadows. The Blackcap will enliven the rambler with his rapturous song, and many more Warblers will have arrived, together with the Stone Curlew, Turtle Dove, Corncrake, and others. The bird-lover's months of waiting and watching are well rewarded in April, and fresh sights and sounds meet him at every turn. Rambling on we see in the hedgerows the wonderfully woven nest of a Field Mouse, but nobody was at

home when we called. Almost touching it a Blackbird's nest was ready for an egg, and an old homestead of the Bullfinch does not escape our attention.

To sum up April I cannot do better than go back to an old work entitled "The Twelve Months," published in 1661, which truly says:—"It is the messenger of many pleasures, the courtier's progress and the farmer's profit, the labourer's harvest and the beggar's pilgrimage," and, I might add, the bird-lover's paradise.

NATURE IN APRIL.

II.

NOW that March winds have passed we may look forward in joy and hope for April showers, which we were taught in our childhood bring forth May flowers.

It has always struck me that this old adage is somewhat of a slight upon the March Violets, for does not the sweet-smelling White Violet, which one stoops to take from its nest of moss under the hawthorn hedge or on the grass-covered bank, give the keenest thrill of pleasure after all? It is emblematical of the approach of Spring, a pleasing notification that Eastertide is not a great way off, that our Summer visitors are already winging their way to the land of the free-born. Therefore, we should hail with delight the appearance of March Violets, and not pass them by unheeded.

But Nature as it appears in April now claims our attention for a while. Stevenson says, "The world is so full of a number of things, I am sure we should all be as happy as Kings," and Stevenson is right. It is these little things which can make us happy that are too generally overlooked in these days of unutterable intensity.

What could be more pleasing than rural surroundings after the warm, refreshing April showers? Every blade of grass is decked with some sparkling gem; the hedgerows glisten as if delighted at the celebration of another Natal day; the birds warble their anthems of praise more delicately and sweetly; the Primroses, Cowslips and budding Hyacinths appear to speak to us as if to say they appreciate the food which the showers afford them.

The Chiff Chaff has made its appearance amongst us. By the wooded coppice, in the gardens, or down the leafy lane, the attentive listener may now hear the welcome, but somewhat monotonous, notes of this diminutive bird.

It is indeed a pleasing symbolic this arrival of our feathered visitors. Has the reader ever noticed the many ways in which the poets have thought fit to compare men and things to birds?

I will give an instance to illustrate my meaning. Blanche Lindsay in a Persian love song says:—

“As a rose to the nightingale sweet I would be,”

and then again,

“What is love but a bird that would touch the blue sky.”

I presume that Blanche Lindsay had in her mind in the last quotation, the Skylark, and this reminds me that probably more poets have made this bird the subject of their muses than any other, notably, Shelley, Wordsworth, Eric Mackay, and James Hogg the Ettrick shepherd.

There is such a fascination about these beautiful creatures which Nature has so graciously bestowed upon us, that makes it incumbent for us to sing their praises, and set forth their glorious traits of character. So happy and contented they seem to be. True the House Sparrow has family troubles at times, the Robin allows no other relation to intrude upon its chosen walk, the sagacious Rooks are very wrath at newcomers, and so on, but, generally speaking, the feathered race, in fact the animal world at large, portray striking evidences of peace and tranquillity.

They seem so conscious of protection, but do they always get it? I think not. Does not the highly-prized, but fast disappearing, Goldfinch, suffer from endless molestation? Does not the Linnet diminish in numbers year by year in a truly lamentable manner? What could one desire better than a Linnet chorus in the concert hall of Nature? The blue azure sky for a roof; grass, soft as velvet, as the floor; fine trees to throw long shadows at eventide, and a gorgeously tinted rainbow thrown across the canopy of heaven! Think, too, of the thousands of Skylarks which are strung up in the poulterers' shops throughout the Winter. Is this the way we appreciate the minstrel of liberty and love?

April brings all such thoughts as these to the mind of the

Naturalist, and perhaps occasionally dishearten him, but why should it be? As Netta Syrett says, 'The world is not only full, but even somewhat inconveniently crowded with a number of things, and in our brief life of three score years and ten we may be pardoned if we find some things a little overwhelming and wide of the mark, which are only satisfactory so far that they make the perfect happiness of kings. It is these wonders of Nature which, as in art, compel us to love the delicate, complete, and intimate, rather than the sublime, suggestive, or remote. What we want is something for every day's most quiet needs.'

'April, with the soft breezes tempered with brilliant sunshine, with Butterflies winging their zig-zag flight, white and yellow ones together, as they now hover over the flickering lovers, now rise swiftly in a cloud, now chase one another in curious curving lines, fluttering, coquetting ceaselessly, their wings flashing like sunlit snowflakes under a sky of dazzling blue,' is paradisiacal indeed.

Variety is pleasing, and on an April morning variety is to be found everywhere. Each component part of Nature seems to be fulfilling a set purpose, each has its allotted task, and right well it is carried out. The cowslip-covered bank, the impenetrable thicket, the hedgerows, the corn fields, the gardens and lanes, byeways and pathways, trees and flowers, birds, insects, and beasts of the field, fish in the bubbling brook and the stagnant pool, all exhibit variety in a marked degree. And what a wonderful contrast, as well as variety, there is in the arena of Nature? The orchestra is composed of voices and monotones of endless variety, the landscape is ever beautiful and of a most varied and pleasing description. There are new sights and sounds at every turn; the gambol of Squirrels, the drumming of a Woodpecker, the graceful figure of a lazy Cow, while from the hill top we observe the village church, which lifts its tapering spire as a witness to holier harvests than are gathered from the fields around.

Around the grey old church tower Jackdaws are discernible, and distance lends enchantment to the scene. Snoozing, blinking Owls haunt the tower also, and the Swift will soon be found hereabouts.

What a glorious view from the hillside! A windmill spreads its canvas to the breeze in a brave competition against steam, and seems to have solved the problem of perpetual motion. Perchance a Kestrel or Sparrow Hawk--two of the balance keepers of Nature--may be seen hovering on buoyant wings, toying in the air, then suddenly darting down like a flash of lightning upon some creature on mother earth.

An English larch-covered bank meets the eye; how enjoyable to lazily squat on the sloping sides watching the soaring Lark and the busy Rooks, the winged creatures of the earth, the Bees and the Spring flowers, and to inhale the sweet aroma.

A cluster of yellow on the right to the uninitiated might be Buttercups, but the searching eye of the Naturalist proves these golden evidences to be giant Daffodils. I do not know the name of the writer, but the following lines exactly describe our next study:—

‘A privet hedge, a belt of silver poplars, part of an ivy-covered wall, form the magic barrier around the rural garden against the outside world, and safe in their shelter lies this little emerald Isle, the perfect home of peace.’

We further observe an English lake, across which the Moorhen is proceeding, leaving behind divergent lines of silver. How charmingly picturesque are the reflections and shadows cast by the Weeping Willows in the pool, and how beautiful the Fir trees on the right bank, with the bright green tassels on the terminal branches. In an old tree by the water-side a pair of Tree Creepers have evidently fixed on a nesting site. Mr. Webster has given us a beautiful photograph of a pair of these happy little creatures.

The proud, haughty Swan glides gracefully along with eyes and ears alert for any intruder. Woe betide anyone who molests the Mute Swan, the variety which adorns our ornamental sheets of water. I heard once of a wager being laid that a friend would not dare to put his hand under a female bird when on her nest, and take away the large dull green egg from the warm seclusion she afforded it; he did so, and that without any reluctance on the part of the bird!

What pleasing customers, too, the Little Grebes are; they are better known in the country, perhaps, as Dabchicks. How artful



A PAIR OF TREE CREEPERS.

and quick they are, and how awkward it is to get a good sight of them, now a hundred yards in front of us, now twice the distance behind us. With their tiny heads, but long necks, just protruding from the water at most unlikely and unlooked for spots, they see us. Down among the weeds they go again and swimming right under water make their appearance farther off than ever. Wonderful exponents, indeed, of the art of natation.

The Rhododendrons are preparing for the hot June sunshine, and up the green drive a proud cock Pheasant struts, its metallic hues showing off to perfection.

To the unobservant, and to the person of morose temperament, there seems to be a lull in the country-side, nothing to attract attention, but to the lover of Nature there is plenty to interest and amuse.

The Seasons are beautifully arranged—Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter, and then again the Spring. It is here, let us appreciate it.

BY THE RIVER.

IN no place are the buds bursting so beautifully and fresh as on the bushes and trees by the river.

Nothing is more interesting and varying at this season than a ramble by some quiet stream, new sights and sounds crop up every minute, and the change from the lanes and woods is decidedly captivating. No sooner have we reached the margin of the silvery stream than we see for the first time a dozen Swallows and Martins skimming along and toying in the air, apparently glad to get back to dear old England once more. Notice, too, the well marked rufous tinge on the breasts of the former; when they have been in the smoky old chimney a little later on they will probably lose much of this beautiful lustre. How marked, too, is the slate-coloured back, upon which the sunlight throws its brilliant beams.

The river is being cleared out for the angler; on the mud by the bank-side more than one variety of bird is to be observed. We may well sit down on the opposite bank, by the side of an old thorn bush, perhaps, and watch the antics of three or four Pied Wagtails. We hear their shrill call-notes, and although we have seen their "wagging" tails hundreds of times, we still admire their curious ways and mannerisms.

One of the party flits on to the top of a time-worn post, and what a picture he looks in his black and white livery! The Wagtails are a most interesting family, and we should indeed miss them were they not present here. They are joined presently by a couple of male Reed Buntings. These latter are too much engaged searching for food amongst the mud-heaps to notice us. How pleasingly the black head and white ringlet harmonises with the rich red colour of the mud and the blades of pure green grass which are springing up out of the rich river soil! Suddenly a Water Vole comes out of its hole right at our feet, and, not seeing us, basks in the sunlight. A slight



NEST AND EGGS OF BLACKBIRD.

move on our part and underneath it goes, only to rise again a few yards away; then it dives once more and finally lands on the opposite bank. Put the field glass to your eyes and watch the Lapwings on the fallows in the distance; now falling, now sweeping, now flying majestically around. Bring also within range the agricultural village which nestles in the distance, and the old farmstead.

Let us move on a bit, taking care to pry into the bushes as we go. In this old thorn bush a male Blackbird is sitting on three or four eggs and almost allows us to touch him before he will be off. How wonderfully compact his nest is may best be imagined by a glance at our illustration on the previous page. What a picture he is, with his fine golden dagger poking over the side of the nest, and those glistening eyes! A fine old tree stands by the river's side, and round it for years past we have known that clinging Ivy bower. Looking round the other side of it, we find a snugly-made nest of the Common Wren, almost complete; a little more workmanship inside and it will be ready for the freckled eggs. Perched on the branches, the male bird sits pouring out his love song. There he sits conscious of our presence, but undisturbed. The closer we get, the louder and more beautifully he sings. Hardly a yard above, a Thrush's nest is found, containing three eggs as blue as the sky overhead.

All around Skylarks are singing, and a score of Ring Doves fly over as straight as an arrow. Rambling on, we come to a bend in the river, just by the old bridge, and meet the angler landing a fine speckled Trout which turns the scale at close on three pounds. It gives us an appetite for our breakfast, as we gaze upon its silver and golden-red hues. In the holes by the old bridge, the Kingfisher will probably nest again as we have known it to do for years past, and, underneath, that pair of Swallows we know so well, will surely find the old loved spot once more.

Another Wren takes up his station and sings a truly remarkable song; so rich and strong are the notes, and of such a trilling character, we almost fancy we are listening to the Tree Pipit. But look at those moving yellow creatures on the banks in the distance! Looking through our glasses we are delighted to observe that a dozen Yellow Wagtails have just



A RUSTIC CORNER.

arrived amongst us. Was ever anything more beautiful than their yellow breasts and the fresh green meadows?

It is curious the birds we see in these situations; the little Coal Tit and Long-Tailed Tit, the former being much noisier than the latter; our old friend the Chaffinch in a fearful state of excitement; the cheery Hedge Sparrow and a flock of noisy Rooks. From the coppice, not a hundred yards away, we hear the notes of the Green Woodpecker, and the "chiff-chaff, chiff-chaff," of the bird of that name and, as we stand listening, a House Martin flits by uttering its pretty little warble. The Martin is by no means a bad singer. More nests in the bushes as we ramble on, and we notice in at least half a dozen Blackbirds' nests one egg broken. Apparently, no boy plunderers have been at the nests. How then were the eggs broken?

Two or three moss and lichen cups are almost ready for eggs, and we are disappointed not to find any blue shells in the Hedge Sparrow's domicile; we are early yet, April is not yet out on the day of our ramble. We have taken with a grain of salt those early Cuckoo and Nightingale records, but at this moment we hear "jug-jug" from the thick coppice, which comes down almost to the water's edge. The Nightingale is here now in *person*. He only utters a few notes, but they are too well-known to be mistaken, and the mimicking Sedge and Reed Warblers are not yet here.

Flitting along from bush to bush in front of us, the Lesser Whitethroat is seen. I often find its nest in a bush by some quiet stream. Suddenly, from its favourite tree, the Tree Pipit really does appear. Up aloft he goes, and having reached a certain altitude, down he comes in a slanting direction with open but motionless wings, singing all the while. Not always does this glorious songster descend to the perch from which he started, as some writers assert, for on this occasion he started from his tree perch and alighted straight on the ground. Standing underneath the tree, we have a fine view of his speckled breast. He sings, too, whilst perching, but the notes are more subdued, and of not such a rapturous description as when he is suspended in the air.

Still bubbling on goes the stream, rushing and caressing, though the rains of the last few days have not made much appreciable

difference in the depth. The old gates which open across the water to enable the cattle to get across, still stand well, and hard by in the tall trees are a dozen Rooks' nests. What a commotion is going on, and how different the language uttered to the more generally known "caws"!

Here we leave the river, to return again later in the season for a cast in that deep hole, where we hope we shall find the Perch "at home."

SEARCHING FOR THE WILLOW TIT.

TOWARDS the end of April 1898 I accompanied Ernst Hartert, the director at the Zoological Museum of the Hon. Walter Rothschild at Tring Park, on an excursion into the County of Bedford for the purpose of finding, if at all possible, the newly discovered British Bird—the Willow Tit (*Parus Salicarius*). First it will be as well, perhaps, to furnish a few particulars of the bird mentioned. It has been proved to occur in the British Isles by the Hon. Walter Rothschild, Ernst Hartert, and Mr. Kleinschmidt, the description being as follows:—The feathers of the crown are black, but not so deep black as in the common Marsh Tit, and more inclining to brown; more lengthened, without strong reflexes and gloss on the tips; less strongly pigmented throughout, and less compact. The tail is considerably more graduated, at least the two lateral pairs being much shortened. The measurements of two English Willow Tits are—wing 61 mm., tail 56 to 57 mm. The flanks are also more rufous than in the Marsh Tit, the secondaries have broader and more brownish edges, and the call-note is different.

It is assumed, from observations made on the Continent, that the locality in which the Willow Tit breeds is in some extended, dark, thick, swampy willow thicket, and that the bird is, like most of the other Titmice, silent so soon as it has eggs. Therefore, it was essential that we should go early to the 'may-be' home. Even as early as the first week in April the Tits are already on their breeding grounds.

It was a pouring wet day, but our enthusiasm was so great that, despite the unpropitious elements, we unanimously decided when standing on Tring Station to do or die. A rather amusing incident occurred when we were taking our tickets at Tring, the booking clerk there inquiring of Mr. Hartert about the safe arrival in a crate of a Kangaroo, but I learned from my friend that instead of a Kangaroo it was really a Cassowary which

had arrived; the one with the yellow neck, a rare fellow, this being procured by Mr. Rothschild for his already grand collection of Cassowaries, one of which figured in my essay entitled "The Museum and Zoo at Tring".

During the journey to Woburn Sands—for this was the destination I had set my eyes on as a likely locality to find the bird we were anxious to know more about—Ernst Hartert was good enough to favour me with his weighty opinion on various matters of an interesting nature. It will not be out of place in this essay to place such opinions on record, and before proceeding with our ramble I propose to do so.

The subject of the protection of birds claimed our attention for a while, and in this respect the arguments of my esteemed companion made a great impression upon me. Regarding the Bird Laws of England, I suggested that they were not nearly stringent enough, but in reply to this Mr. Hartert informed me that in the land of his birth (Germany) the laws were most exacting, and, as a result, the birds have not increased one iota; cultivation has gone forward with such rapid strides that certain birds have been in many instances driven right away, and even if the laws of our own Country were as strict as those of the Fatherland no other result would accrue. "If you could stop cultivation, and extinguish men, the birds would soon increase," said Mr. Hartert.

As to wearing birds and their feathers for female adornment, Mr. Hartert gave it as his opinion that statements of a most erroneous kind were frequently made. For instance, a paper in Germany once stated that a consignment of 800 Morocco Parrots had arrived for female wear, whereas there is no species of Parrot in that Country, and this Mr. Hartert pointed out to the paper at the time the extraordinary announcement was made.

He complained of the way in which most birds were mutilated when put on ladies hats. The milliners, he said, had no taste whatever in that direction, and the only time that he had ever seen a bird on a lady's hat which looked natural was a Humming Bird on a hat at Berlin.

It was only natural, said Mr. Hartert, this bird adornment. The savage races of America, Africa, and elsewhere, from time

immemorial, adorned their hair with feathers, and so it was in civilized Countries. What should be put a stop to entirely was the killing of birds during the breeding season, which was a distinctly cruel and unwise operation, and might result in the loss of many birds, while at any other time this would not be the case. The Hon. Walter Rothschild some few years ago introduced a great many Little Owls in Tring Park. Nearly all these have disappeared, although one is recorded as having been found breeding in the County of Hertford in the "Report of Birds in Hertfordshire in 1897," and probably this was one of them. I must, however, hasten on as to how far we succeeded in the discovery of the Willow Tit.

The Duke of Bedford's noble woods in the Woburn and Woburn Sands district are not so well known, perhaps, as they might be, and when I say that a gentleman who has travelled almost the wide world over, such as Ernst Hartert has, exclaimed "Lovely indeed," I have said sufficient for them.

As soon as we were under the welcome shelter afforded by the stately Firs, the Willow Wren and the Chiff Chaff bade us "Welcome." Wood Pigeons flushed off their nests, and startled Jays bounded off into the coppice. A curious noise like that of a young Crow, which was apparently made by a Jay, once interested us greatly, and we hastened to the spot whence it came, but on reaching it we could see nothing, although I caught sight of a somewhat large bird which, owing to the distance, I could not possibly identify. Thus commenced the excitement of our hunt for the Willow Tit. The avenues of trees were in the height of their beauty. Even the copious streamlets did not damp our ardour. Everything glistened with silver rain-drops. Primroses, Wild Hyacinths and Bilberries were all in flower, and the herbage by the side of a trickling ditch called forth our admiration.

Still rambling through these sylvan scenes to the spot that I had promised to direct Mr. Hartert to, we noticed the long pliant branches of Dog Roses; the light leaves of budding trees; the fresh green foliage of the Chestnut, the Hawthorn, and the Hazel; we heard a Green Woodpecker in the distance, and saw a dead Squirrel strung on the low boughs of a giant Scotch Fir. The carol of a Wren and two Nightingales; the cry of the

Cuckoo; the rapturous trill of the Tree Pipit, and the bell-like note of the Great Tit mingled harmoniously together. Dog Violets peeped out of the many varieties of Moss which here abound; the Furze bushes blazed out in gold and Anemones besprinkled the thickets.

We at last arrived in the locality where I was under the impression we might find the Willow Tit, but my companion at once gave it as his decided opinion that the surroundings were not nearly thick or dark enough for our excursions to prove successful. However, we immediately saw what was apparently the common Marsh Tit, and this gave us hope, but unfortunately it was the only one we saw, and it flitted off into the thick wood. The only way of seeing what it really was would have been to shoot it, but this was not our intention, and we preferred to watch its movements and endeavour to find its nest. All along the ditches and the hedgerows, among the tangled masses of tree stumps, we searched in vain. Now and then a Blackbird's or a Thrush's nest was presented to view, and occasionally that of a Chaffinch. Many old homesteads bore evidences of their excellent construction last Summer, and we could see and hear everything almost excepting the Willow Tit. These are the Titmice family that we saw and heard:—Long Tailed Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Great Tit, Marsh Tit (seen once only). The woods were alive with the first four, but the Willow and Marsh varieties were absent.

We left this paradise for a few hours, making our way across an open track, where on a Summer's evening I have in days gone by heard as many as six Nightjars pouring out their jarring warble at one time, and watched a passing Barn Owl. To a Spruce Fir plantation we betook ourselves. On the way we saw and heard the Golden Crested Wren - the most diminutive of our British birds—the Chiff Chaff was everywhere, and the Willow Wren likewise.

Another company of Titmice were chattering away in the matted branches of a tree, whilst up another green drive, we had the satisfaction of observing what was undoubtedly a small stray flock of Bramblings, who, by this time, should be back in the far distant regions of Scandinavia, though this bird comes South in large flocks in Winter. A Nuthatch was to be heard

hereabouts for the first time on our rambles, but the little Tree Creeper was not to be seen or heard.

After a cursory inspection of several large nests, we made tracks again to where, early in the morning, we had seen the solitary Marsh Tit. Our journey there, however, was a fruitless one, as it was nowhere to be seen. For more than an hour we patiently waited on the chance of its occurring again, but luck was against us. As the rain was still descending, and no good purpose could be served, under the circumstances, by staying, we turned our footsteps homeward rather earlier than we had intended. Had the weather been fine, upon the sloping cowslip-covered bank we might have rested, watching and waiting for the appearance of any interesting bird. As we stepped out of the woodland glen into the green fields once again, the Willow Wren and the Redbreast bade us "Farewell" in as lively and melodious a strain as they had bade us "Welcome."

On some future occasion we shall search fresh ground for the may-be home of the Willow Tit, but our fruitless excursion in this direction was fraught with pleasing episodes and delightful surroundings such as lovers of Nature cannot fail to enjoy.

MAY.



MAY BLOSSOM.

NATURE IN MAY.

ALL the Summer visitors have arrived; the late comers such as the Swift, Marsh Warbler, Quail, Corncrake, and Nightjar are now amongst us. Even in "Merrie May" the wind still blows keen, though the sun is daily making its presence the more felt.

Now that the Migrants have all made their appearance, the rambler looks and listens at every likely spot. From that belt of woodland the cry of "Cuckoo" comes pleasantly, and over the topmost twigs of yonder hedge we look for the Greater Whitethroat. Towards the end of the month we may find its snug little nest in the recesses of the copse, a thick bramble bush, perhaps. It would be a shame to rob such a delicate songster of one single egg.

The Sycamore seems almost more beautiful than when we last wrote. Secreted somewhere in the topmost branches we hear the Chaffinch sing. Straining our eyes we are amazed to see a male bird of a buff colour. I have seen them inclining to albinism before, but very rarely, and then never in their natural wild state.

This is the season of the Greater Stitchwort; it is more prominent than the Lesser variety. So, too, is the Laburnum in its beauty now, the chains hanging suspended like so many golden butterflies. But what of the Hawthorn blossom? Mention must be made of it, or our essay will be far from complete. It is very often not in blossom by the first of the month; in some sheltered spots the beautiful snow-white blossoms will first be seen. The May girls come badly off in a late Summer, for the season being so backward wild flowers are not very abundant.

Crossing a green meadow we step across a Slow Worm; harmless, innocent creature. It is called the Blind Worm, but it is far from blind; just watch its bright eyes. Persecuted by



A PAIR OF REDBREASTS, NEST AND EGGS.

boys owing to its supposed snake-like character is this creature, but it harms nobody. Notice the Wild Cherry blossom by the side of the wood skirting the end of the meadow, the Wood Sorrel and the Woodruff. The latter is now in blossom; it does not smell so sweet when first plucked as when rubbed between the fingers, or put in the kerchief drawer; then it gives a beautiful aroma.

As soon as the Hawthorn is in leaf the Cockchafer makes its first appearance. The "Common" Sparrows like these and get them too, in spite of what is said by Sparrow haters to the contrary. If they do not come out until the Sparrows—or the Avian Rats as Mr. Tegetmeier has called them—have retired to rest, cannot they get them during the day when they are scratching and fumbling in the leaves or anywhere else where the Chafers hide?

The Garden Warbler is seen in the cottager's garden; how beautiful its song. This bird is not well known, nor, indeed, is the bird from whom that strange sound is now proceeding—the Grasshopper Warbler. The extraordinary situations in which birds so often place their nests is well illustrated by glancing at the photograph of a pair of Redbreasts, their nest and eggs, on page 84. It will be seen they have chosen a very snug nesting site in an old pitcher which has apparently been thrown into the hedgerow. As a study from still life, this beautiful group is a striking representation of the art of the Curator and the Camera.

The Orchises are lovely now, the Meadow, the Bee and other varieties; they are like so many gorgeously painted insects settled on the stems, a wonderful illustration of mimicry in Nature.

Skimming the lake we observe a dozen pairs of Sand Martins. We often observe them in this locality. There is a sand pit hard by; we have known the tunnels there for years past. How brown their backs when compared with the Swallows and House Martins, which dart in and out of the little company. Here, too, we may perhaps see the Grey Wagtail, but it is in the Western Counties more especially where he is found. Darting past goes an Orange-tip Butterfly; how beautifully and delicately painted, and how fragile! The male only has the orange-tipped wings.



WATER PLANTS.

The Red Oak is well out now and harmonises nicely with the Green variety. Just watch for a moment that Redstart in the topmost branches, notice his flame-coloured tail feathers. How they contrast with the more sombre colouring of his other parts. In that old shed, the nest, with six little green eggs, is probably secreted. We have not yet left the water, please glance in by the side of this old woodwork and look at those tiny habitations which the Caddis Worm has built. Some are mere black bits of wood, others are encrusted with minute, dazzling, oyster-coloured shells and other matter. How wonderful these tiny mansions, and how extraordinary the all-wise hand of Nature seems to be as we see the head and legs of the Caddis protruding from one end and climbing along the bed of the river, or up the water-worn posts! The angler knows the "feel" of a Cad-shell when he puts his hand down the side of the old bridge or post, and knows such a tempting bait will bring him a nice basket of Roach or Dace. I have often felt guilty when I have dislodged the owner and thrown carelessly away the empty house. Pay particular attention to the Water Plants for they are a veritable study in themselves. A picture of a few of them is given on the previous page.

Let us go through the Corn field now and watch the waving blades and listen to the "crex, crex" of the ventriloquial Landrail or Corncrake. Do you hear him now? He is coming towards us—now away—now near—he runs as fast and as fleet as a Deer, and his voice travels with him. How curious he never takes to flight much, and yet a migratory bird!

Philomel starts up out of that thick thorn bush, and a fluty Blackbird duly follows suit. Right over the bush a Lapwing wheels, uttering his love song—call it not a wild cry—and the Willow Wren pours out a delicate little warble. See those cattle grazing yonder, and that old wooden fence? Let us go there, we may perchance see something. Luck is with us, for true enough a Spotted Flycatcher darts off from his accustomed watch-post after the luscious insect, then back again. He has his nest in the grape vine at the miller's, or in some wall, or outhouse not far away. We are close to him now; notice his speckled breast.

In the gardens, the vegetable and flower seeds are nicely



A PAIR OF SKYLARKS, NEST AND EGGS.

up now, and the Polyanthus in the cottager's home garden make a brave show with Oxlips, and budding Pinks, Carnations, Nutmeg, May, Stocks, and many coloured Pansies.

Right over us soars a Skylark; notice that at this season the song is hardly so well sustained as a short time back; it seems to finish about three parts through, at least those in our district do. In the illustration given of this bird, with the three brownish coloured eggs secreted in the cup-shaped depression in the ground, one of the parent birds is seen dropping to the earth after one of those heavenward soarings in which this minstrel so delights, and its partner appears in the picture as if welcoming him, and congratulating herself that she has such a model husband.

The Lambs—at any rate those not killed off—are strong, but still frolicsome. The old ones look on at their playful skirmishes and seem to say, “Ah, if you live to get as old as us you will know better!”

We rest upon the old stile, we have known it for years; our grandfather tells us it was there when he was a boy and his father often rested upon it, so we *must* sit down and take a view of the distant landscape.

How lovely everywhere and everything! I need not attempt to describe the scene, it is well known to the Nature soul. Right across goes a Red Admiral Butterfly; what a poor name for such a handsome creature! A Bunting or two disport themselves in the hedgerow, and a Robin goes in the tangled bank with a worm. The Red and White Campions are out now, and the various specimens of Wild Geraniums. So also is the Horse Chestnut and the Crab blossom, and this is the season, too, of the Wild Hyacinths—white and blue, the latter for the most part.

The migrants and resident birds are nearly all singing, though the Tits are almost silent, and they are all busy with parental cares and affections. The Great Titmouse—or Oxeye as he is called in the country—is another bird which is very fond of building in all manner of out-of-the-way places. I give an illustration of a pair of these birds with their nest built in a beehive, a portion of the hive having been cut away for the purpose of showing the nest. Notice the snug nest containing six white eggs, freckled with light brown.



A PAIR OF GREAT TITS, NEST AND EGGS IN A BEEHIVE.

A NESTING RAMBLE.

I write these lines immediately after returning from a rural ramble through one of the prettiest parts of the County of Hertfordshire, a county of which we should be justly proud. There is nothing especially gaudy about it, but everything is simple and in its place; what there is of it is beautiful, and as we stand gazing to the distant hill-tops we see nothing that can be removed from the landscape without a positive loss to harmony.

The feathered race are now experiencing their busiest season, and during this month and leafy June many birds only manage to snatch a few hours respite from their untiring labours. All our Summer migrants have by this time made their appearance, and are anxious to commence the work of nidification without delay.

It is a pure and simple nesting excursion on which I have thought fit to write in this article.

It was towards the end of May, and after a somewhat dull opening it turned out a most glorious afternoon. The showers of the days preceding had performed their work perfectly; the gentle raindrops had washed away the dirt and dust that congregates in dry seasons round the rapidly forming fruit, and have helped to set it; now we may look forward in joy and hope for the harvest.

I have not the space at my disposal to deal with the whole forty-one varieties of nests met with - almost a record for such a short ramble—but I propose to deal with those which I think will be of the greatest interest to the general body of readers.

It was not long before the first nest presented itself, and was, as I had anticipated, one of the Chaffinch. Wonderful indeed is the increase in these birds from year to year, and right glad should we be that such a popular and pleasing songster is

multiplying to such an extent. Not only is the Martin under the eaves conscious of protection, the Chaffinch is too, and so in fact is every bird, otherwise they would not choose as their nesting sites such open situations. When unmolested there is always evidence forthcoming that the feathered race prefer being in close proximity to man, rather than being driven away into wild, desolate, and uncultivated districts. I could not accurately say how many Chaffinches' nests I found, and each one brought forth the remark "I never saw such a lovely nest before"; but I do not ever remember seeing a badly or slovenly built nest of this bird. How wonderfully, too, is the nest in touch with the surroundings! The limb of a tree is covered with green moss and silver lichen, and not a great distance away one observes what is apparently the same, but to the cultivated eye of the Naturalist it is a nest of the Chaffinch.

Although doubtless there are many who are already well aware of the materials with which the nests of the commoner birds are constructed, I have been so utterly surprised and even disgusted at the ignorance of persons who have resided in the country the whole of their lives, that it is my intention to give a description of such nests.

One person I was conversing with was good enough to inform me that he was always under the impression that Rooks were young Crows, that the female Robin was the Wren, and so on. It is really surprising the ignorance of those who have every facility afforded them for making observations, even if they have neither eyes or ears alert to such sights and sounds. But to the nest of the Chaffinch: it is composed externally of moss, fine wool, lichen, the scales of bark, and often spiders' webs, all neatly felted together; presenting a smooth and carefully-finished exterior; internally it is delicately lined with wool and hairs. It is very securely attached to the supporting stems by bands of moss, felted with wool, which are twisted round them and worked into the mass of materials composing the nest. The situations generally chosen by the Chaffinch for a nesting site are the Elm, Oak, Hawthorn, Bramble and thick tall bushes. I have also found the nest in a thick Holly, and also on an old Apple tree overgrown with moss and lichens; sometimes it is shrouded among the luxuriant Ivy encircling the trunks of Elms or other trees.



A PAIR OF LONG TAILED TITS, AND NEST.

I found eggs varying in number from one to five, in one instance a young fledgling and three eggs.

The sweet twittering Hedge Sparrow seemed to be beseeching us in almost poetical language not to meddle with his homestead. The component parts are somewhat similar to those of the last mentioned variety, with the addition of grasses and bents, but, although it is by no means shabby, it is not nearly of such an attractive description, and is larger. How picturesque are the delicate blue eggs, as we stretch over the budding hedgerow, or into the thick bushes, and gaze into the dark hairy cup!

That favourite bird of the country the Long Tailed Titmouse, may be seen with the partner of its joys and sorrows clinging round the branches; hard by is its beautiful lichen and moss ball—for really the nest is best described as such—and the photograph of the birds and the nest on page 93 will bear out my statements. I have known a pair of these birds to use over 2,000 feathers in the construction of their homestead, each feather representing a separate journey. My friend and brother Naturalist Mr. Basil H. Davies dissected one and counted 1,779, to give the exact figures. Besides moss and lichens, wool, spiders webs, skeletonised leaves and bits of old newspapers are also used in its construction. It is to my mind the most beautiful example of bird architecture in Great Britain.

I had the good fortune on the day mentioned to find several stens of the Greater or Common Whitethroat—more generally known perhaps by the non-scientific observer as the Haytit—containing four eggs. Certain it is that this sprightly little migrant had not been idle since his arrival amongst us. The nest is of a simple, and yet elegant, construction; it is small and compact, consisting of dried grasses, with occasionally a few hairs as a lining. One nest that I found was placed in a low quick-set hedge, and not more than a few feet from it I saw sitting on her nest a female Bullfinch. I watched her for a time, and then she thought it best to beat a hasty retreat into the coppice by the roadside. I examined the nest of fibrous roots—with which this bird constructs its nest entirely—and found four beautifully marked eggs. This was somewhat early for the Bullfinch to have eggs, and strange to say, on



NEST AND EGGS OF HAWFINCH.

my homeward journey I found yet another nest of this bird almost ready for eggs, also in a hawthorn hedge.

The Hawfinch is believed to be increasing its range in this Country. It is a somewhat shy bird and hence may be often overlooked. The nest is placed in bushes, arms of trees, among intertangled bowers, and so forth. It consists of small twigs for the most part, together with stems of plants and lichens, with a lining of hair and roots, but not always the former. It is a loose, but—as will be seen from Mr. Newman's charming photograph—a by no means untidy structure.

In a neighbouring orchard—the pink and snow-white blossoms looking beautiful in the golden sunlight—I looked anxiously for the Spotted Flycatcher, and had the satisfaction of seeing it darting after the highly luscious insects, which were in their thousands near the cattle; the latter were basking their dappled hides in the warmth afforded them. At this moment I heard two glorious Nightingales singing in unison, and if I heard one during the afternoon I heard a dozen. If only every bird concealed its nest as does Philomel, what a great many birds would be saved.

Several times on my ramble I found nests cruelly robbed—or more strictly speaking “lugged”—and one of these despoilers may be seen in the frontispiece of the next month with which we have to deal. What a study! All the talking in the world, and all the notices posted in conspicuous places, seems to have no effect whatever on these marauders, and the only remedy I can suggest is that the rural policeman should be “about,” especially on the Sabbath, on which day these depredations are generally carried out.

It made my heart ache to find a beautiful nest of the Chaffinch, Thrush or Blackbird, lying in the roadway with the eggs all smashed. Two Wren's nests were carefully placed between a couple of sturdy Hawthorn stems: how often the Wren changes the materials for the construction of its nest according to the surroundings. At intervals a cluster of dead oak leaves might be seen in the hedgerows and the nest of this bird could easily have passed for such but for the cultivated eye again. The nest was composed of dead leaves—placed upon a foundation of moss—with a small hole at the top, profusely



NEST AND EGGS OF YELLOW BUNTING.

lined with hair, roots and feathers. From an outside point of view the nest of this bird is not particularly attractive, but inside it is a beautiful effort. Both nests were ready for eggs, which sometimes number as many as a dozen. The cow-dung lined nest of the Song Thrush—showing off to perfection the freckled blue eggs—and the bulky home of the Blackbird were to be seen at every turn.

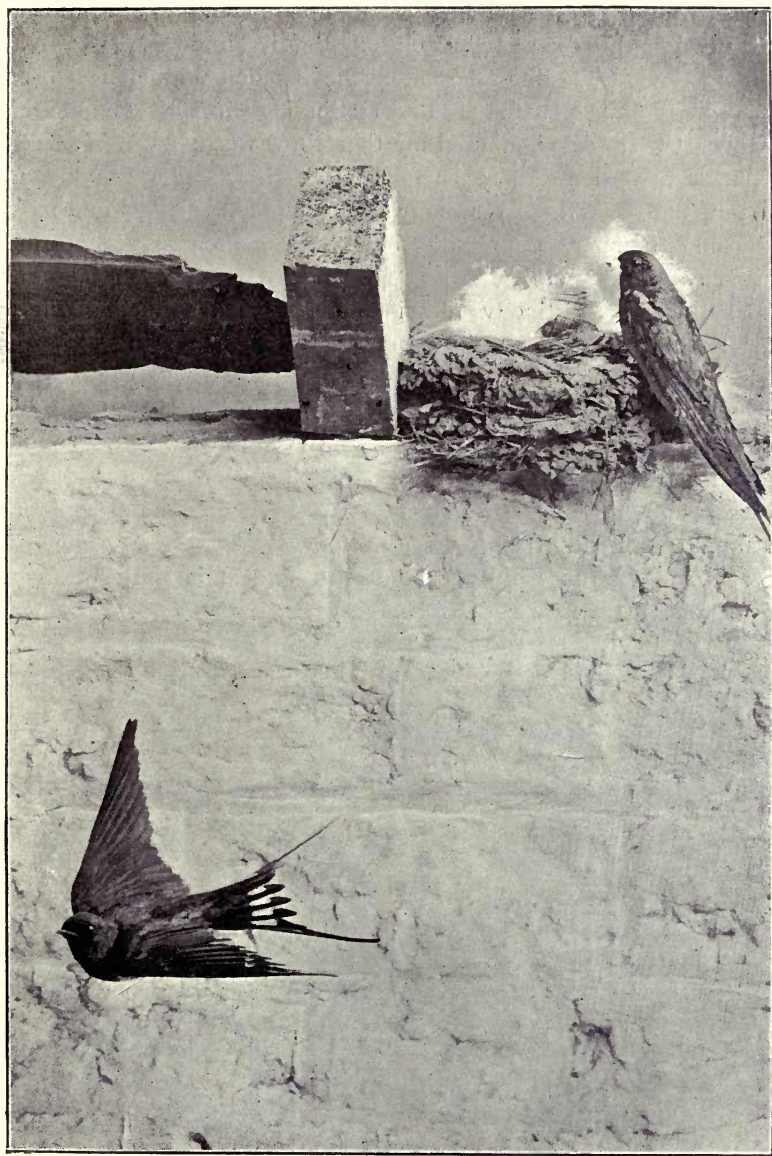
Into the hole of a rotten tree the Starling darts with a grub in its mouth, to satisfy the voracious appetites of the young ones. Truly a grub-destroying bird is the Starling.

I found a Blackcap's nest ready for eggs in a most exposed situation, and this bird was to be heard nearly the whole time I was alone with Nature. The somewhat monotonous notes of the Yellow Bunting drew my attention to that bird exhibiting strange evolutions over the topmost twigs, and as he was not anxious to vacate the locality I had the curiousness to peep into the thick hedgerow. I stopped right in front of a matted trunk, and secluded in the centre I had the gratification of finding its nest. It was composed of dried grasses with a lining of hairs, a very neat nest indeed. It was just ready to receive the three to five eggs, which are white, with extraordinary chocolate and dark-brown zig-zag lines and markings, which has resulted in the bird being called in some localities the "Scribbling Lark." An illustration is given of a Yellow Bunting's nest placed in a Strawberry plant and very beautiful does it look in such a delicate position.

By the side of the railway bank the Tree Pipit had a nest methinks, and he also, like the Blackcap, was to be heard on all sides. There are some species which are apparently on the increase, and right glad news it is when evidences of such cruel molestation are so evident.

How beautifully graceful the flight of the Swallow is may best be seen by a careful inspection of the bird on the left hand side of our illustration. The nest—as will be observed—has been placed in some outbuilding, and one of the parent birds is making the beautiful feathered lining, after the mud, hay and straw portions have been used to their satisfaction.

It is pleasing to find the nest of the Turtle Dove. Mr. Stone has given us a very careful study from still life on page 101.



A PAIR OF SWALLOWS AND NEST.

I have only described a few nests I came across, but I find myself in the position I have often done before—that of having to unwillingly draw to a close. Before I do so I should like to mention that hereafter the Golden Plover is to be honoured with a place in my list of “Singing Birds.” Having seen one or two to-day reminded me that a few weeks ago I observed a flock of at least three or four hundred, wheeling round and round, and the whole company twittering and calling in a most pleasing manner, then with a mighty momentous sweep and in unison, settling on some ploughed land amongst yet another flock. It was distinctly pleasing to see such a flock in Hertfordshire.

The Swifts on the day of my nesting ramble were to be seen towering up towards the clouds. On craggy precipices amongst the Sea birds in their thousands is doubtless exciting and interesting, but the quiet secluded leafy lanes, the woodland glens, and the sylvan glades of Hertfordshire, possess more attraction for me than adventures among the Eagles, Falcons, Skuas, and hosts of other birds who wheel in buoyant flight over the vast expanse of the mighty deep.



A PAIR OF TURTLE DOVES, NEST AND EGGS.

IN A COUNTRY LANE.

IT is near the middle of May, three hours before sunset, and we find ourselves in one of the quiet, secluded leafy lanes of a Home County. It has been a day tempered with brilliant sunshine, and all Nature seems pleased.

Turning round the corner out of the main road, by the time-worn sign post—the main post plastered with an announcement of a sale at a neighbouring farmhouse—we are safe from interruption, and can hear and watch all that is going on. The first thing which attracts our notice is a Redbreast hopping in front of us, turning his head first one side and then the other to see if we are peeping into that grassy tangled bank or that clustering ivy bower for the nest. Then, in the tall trees above us, the little Wood Wren, in his green and gold livery, treats us to a delicate warble and then off to the next giant forester on the other side of the lane, for on the left it is woodland.

Skirmishing through the tall trees a few restless Jays disport themselves, but our attention is distracted by an Orange-tip Butterfly flying right across us. A Nightingale takes up the chorus of welcome afforded. He has surely not arrived here long—that particular bird—for he is in by no means good song yet. Those rich, mellow notes are absent that we know full well *will* come.

The hedge on the right is sheltered from the still keen winds, and here we look for and find nests in abundance. It has been cut very low by the grey haired old hedgeman, but Ivy clusters almost continuously, and clinging wandering Honeysuckle is present in plenty. In that likely looking clump we find a Hedge Sparrow's nest, containing four deliciously blue eggs. Rather a large nest for so small a bird we observe in passing. But lo, here, not a foot away in the same clump, a speckled Thrush has placed its marvellous



NEST AND EGGS OF SONG THRUSH.

homestead. How beautifully rounded is the interior, and how those freckled blue eggs,

Ink-spotted over, shells of green and blue:
Like heath-bells gilt with dew:

stand out against the brown ground-work of the nest.

In the young Fir trees—the green tassels now in all their beauty—the rival males are singing. The cheery Hedge Accentor—clad in plain brown livery—is content to warble sweet and low; but King Thrush pours out his rich mellow notes,

Tiurru, tiurra, chipiwi, Too-tee, too-tee, chinchoo,

loud and long. This is their language, and what those musical utterances mean may be rivalry on the part of the males.

Walking on, a nest of the Chaffinch presents itself in a low Beech. We remark that it is very rare that any bird places its nest in such a tree. At least that is our experience.

All along the hedges Hyacinths are blooming, together with the Stitchwort, and the many coloured leaves of the shooting Sycamore make a fine background. We stoop to pluck one of these Wild Hyacinths, and in the act frighten a Robin out of the tangled bank. Looking carefully, we find the snuggest nest imaginable. There is a small hole between the fallen leaves for the ingress and egress of the bird, but pulling one or two of the leaves away with the fingers exhibits the beautifully constructed nest. It is quite ready for the red freckled eggs, which let us hope will be safely hatched, and the youngsters safely reared.

Farther on we observe two or three more Hedge Sparrows' nests—all with those delicately painted shells—and a fluty Blackbird then strikes up his alarm cry. In between a sturdy Nut Hazel stem, we find the well constructed nest. How strongly felted together it is, so much so that no wind can shift it. We notice the two greenish eggs, blotched with brown, then make the nest somewhat more secure from the gangs of nest robbers, and we pass on.

How the Cowslips smell, they betray their presence over the other side of the hedgerow. We mount the bank and a



NEST AND EGGS OF TREE CREEPER.

whole row of glittering yellow and dark gold meets the eye, with drooping bells of blue mingling in between.

Near here is an old tree, the stump only left. There are many holes in it, and on tapping it half a dozen mimicing Starlings fly out. A pair of Green Woodpeckers inhabit one of the holes too, and at the top in that jagged fissure the little Tree Creeper has chosen a nesting place. In our illustration a nest is shewn placed in the hole of an old tree. Owing to the searching nature of the camera the reader will easily trace the red freckled eggs, mostly marked at the larger end. The lining of hair and feathers is also very prominent.

We rest awhile by the old rustic gateway, and whilst doing so listen to the feathered musicians round about us. We hear the curious love songs of three or four varieties of Titmice—the Blue, Coal, Long Tailed, and Great Tits—the fluty Blackbird and speckled Thrush: the cheery Hedge Sparrow and artful Redbreast: the carol of a Wren and the warble of the Willow Wren: the two Whitethroats: the Ring and Turtle Doves: the cawing Rooks in the pasture lands and the Plovers on the fallows: the trilling Skylark: the abrupt song of the Chaffinch, and sombre-plumed Philomel. We can hear all these, and more besides, though the musicians themselves may not all be seen from our vantage ground.

The Blue Tit places its nest in almost any hole. I have found it down lamp posts, in letter boxes, banks, walls, and—as will be seen from our illustration—in the hole of a tree.

The sun is fast sinking now, but what a glorious sunset! The sky is blue for the most part, with floating patches of light red, crimson, and pink. Against this we see through the hedgerow a few Swallows and House Martins disporting themselves, and partaking of a few more insects before bed time. The Yellow Bunting must not be overlooked, he is far too conspicuous an ornament to our landscape to be passed over. His nest is too snugly hid to attract our attention now, especially as it is getting quite dusk.

How we know this old lane. The gipsies used to camp here regularly in our childhood's days, and just a stray party does so now occasionally. We remember where in years gone by we have found a certain rare nest, or seen a rare bird: we

the nest was found in a hole in the bark of a tree.



NEST AND EGGS OF BLUE TITMOUSE.

discuss the various changes which have taken place all too quickly. We remember when that black wood in the distance was a mere plantation, and have gradually seen those winding paths made into well beaten tracks. We remember the hospitable old gentleman who used to keep the farmhouse at the top of the hill, and wish we could call him back again.

A last peep into a thick Holly bush, and we are just able to discern a nest full of young Hedge Sparrows. There they are, five in number, all with gaping mouths waiting for another fill before the mother's tender care is finished for the day, and they nestle beneath her warm little breast. All this we see in the lane, there is no need to go out of it, for new sights and sounds crop up at every turn.

The labourer—decked out in his Sunday black—with his wife and children, looking the very picture of health, passes across the top of the lane and wishes us a cheery 'Goodnight.' The sun has now departed, the feathered race are all silent, the daisies have closed their eyelids, and we leave this paradise to the occupants whose life and habits have afforded us such interest and pleasure.

A CHAT ABOUT BIRDS.

WHENEVER I take up my pen to write an article on birds, or when I converse about them, I am always possessed with a desire to wax eloquent respecting the sights, sounds, and conditions which prevail. There is a something connected with their being that I cannot adequately put into words. It may be that thinking of rural surroundings and rustic environments affords me pleasure and contentment when I am amidst the work-a-day world and the busy turmoil of City life.

I picture the thatched cottage with the lattice window on which the climbing roses love to entwine themselves; the natural garden; the box or evergreen hedge; birds flitting hither and thither, and the snow-white blossoms in the orchard. Perhaps this is one reason why my heart and soul desire to burst into attempted eloquence when birds are the subject of our discourses and writings.

Their innocence and usefulness; their powers of flight and the sweetness of their voices; their delicately woven homesteads and the beautiful variations in the colouring of their eggs; their exquisite robes of beauty and their sombre garbs; their curious and interesting mannerisms, all these cast a halo of attraction around them which should in the mind of every lover of Nature hold an abiding sway.

There always appears to be something different in the habits of birds, no matter how many constitute a species. Take the Titmice family, for instance; one possesses a note of very low compass, another pours out a beautiful little song; then there is the bell-like note of the Great Tit, and I might go on enumerating the diversity which exists in the nature of their vocal powers.

The various modes in which their nests are constructed affords us also food for meditation. Take a Yellow Bunting's, a Whitethroat's, or a Blackcap's—how simple and plain is



NEST AND EGGS OF DARTFORD WARBLER.

their construction. Compare these cups of dried grass and straws with the wonderful nest of the Song Thrush—with its well-garnished coating of cow-dung, which affords such excellent protection to the young from the cold East winds of early Spring—the moss and lichen cup of the Chaffinch, the marvellous homestead of the Long Tailed Titmouse or the homely little Hedge Sparrow; the latter is a plain bird so far as Nature has adorned it, but a pretty and attractive nest does it build, laying such lovely blue eggs, and a delicate songster withal. How pleasingly contrasting.

In this particular respect, I might go on comparing the materials with which the nests of our feathered pets are constructed, and the mode of their construction. I might contrast the rude bare nest of the Nightjar, Landrail, or Plover, with the chips of wood and a few feathers which serve as the home of the Owls and the Woodpeckers; the rude and rugged nests of Gulls, Guillemots, Cormorants, Eagles, Falcons, and the like—placed in rocky, inaccessible precipices and precarious overhanging crags—with the humble home of the Chiff Chaff and the Willow Wren, or the huge nests of the Jackdaw, Jay, and Magpie, with the shingle beach and the golden sand shore which serves as a nest for the Terns to lay their freckled egg shells on.

Then I might contrast the House Sparrow's wonderful attempt at building a domicile, with the plaster cup of the Martin and the tunnels of the Sand Martin; or the apology for a nest—comprised of fish bones generally—of the Kingfisher by the side of the bubbling rivulet, or the rush nest by the water's edge of the Moorhen and the Little Grebe. I might go on and on again, but I think I have already said enough to show in a degree the difference and divergence which a patient and attentive observer may single out.

This little chat would certainly be far from complete without a reference to the vocal powers of our British Birds. The mention of the last three words reminds me that as a result of the destruction which has been carried on amongst them, only about 180 varieties now breed regularly in the British Isles. When we consider the amount of good which birds do—and that without their aid vegetation would probably suffer



A PAIR OF SHELDRAKES.

to an enormous extent—it is alarming to notify the destruction which is being carried on among them. But I must not divert from the point at issue, their vocal powers. What shall I say of them? Well, there is the thrilling lay of the Skylark, the laugh of the Woodpecker, the ‘pink-pink’ and the abruptly finished warble of the Chaffinch. Shall I contrast the cawing of the busy Rooks with the captivating melodies of the Nightingale; the ‘crex-crex’ of the ventriloquial Landrail with the bubbling little warble of the Wren or the flute-like notes of him of the golden dagger—the Blackbird; the hoot of the Barn Owl and the jarring warble of the Nightjar; the screeching of birds of prey; the curious note of the Nuthatch; the ‘cock-up’ of the Pheasant; the voice of the amorous Turtle-Dove; such are some of the pleasing contrasts which Nature has provided for us.

I might still go on here again, but I must hasten on. What shall I say of their plumage and their eggs? Has human skill ever yet displayed such exquisite taste and delicate workmanship? Let us picture on the wide canvas of Nature—with the glorious green pastures and the clear blue sky as a background—the sooty Blackbird with dark lustrous eyes, and the brightly-plumed Chaffinch: there is a contrast indeed!

Side by side let the reader imagine the Ptarmigan in its white Winter dress, and the Crow tribe, the Rook, Crow, Raven, Jackdaw, and Starling—that bird of so many hues—and so on. The Kestrel and Sparrow Hawk, with the most diminutive of our British Birds, the Golden Crested Wren. The Golden Eagle and the Peregrine Falcon, with the Brown Wren and the Robin; the Cormorant and the silly Shag, with the Kingfisher or the gorgeous Golden Oriole; the Stormy Petrel with the Fulmar species; the blinking, snoozing Owls with the beautiful Goldfinch, Greenfinch, or Bullfinch; the Gulls and Guillemots with the Tree Pipit, Woodlark, and Skylark; the curious strutting Puffins and handsome Divers, with the gentle little Whitethroat or the Blackcap, and onwards I might proceed. Is there not a feeling of wonderment and admiration when these pictures of diversity and beauty are portrayed to view? Surely so. To the lover of Nature all things are beautiful; to the casual observer it is different. Sight and sounds, such as these, do



A PAIR OF SPARROW HAWKS, NEST AND EGGS.

not enhance his mind, nor lull his senses into a glorious peace—the peace of happiness.

I might go on setting out their different modes of flight and movements, such as the hovering of the birds of prey, the mighty sweep of the Peregrine, the flight of the Buntings by odd jerks and gesticulations; the soaring of the Lark, the antics of the Pied Wagtail—the smallest bird that walks—and I might also characterise their foods.

I could set out those which are insectivorous; birds that are preyed upon, reptile ravagers, and so on, but I must draw to a close.

Enough is as good as a feast the old adage has it, and I must follow in its footsteps trusting that this little chat may have entertained many who have heretofore evinced no interest whatever in the useful and interesting study of our feathered pets.



NEST AND EGGS OF NIGHTINGALE.

BIRD LIFE AT THE SHETLAND ISLANDS.

To those resident South of the Tweed the bird life which exists right up in the North of our little Island often excites keen enthusiasm and a wish to go there, and, therefore, a feeling of intense excitement and pleasure comes over one when he finds himself duly packed and labelled for that home of Sea Birds—the Shetland Isles.

Perhaps any individual—even one of a very morose and uninteresting temperament—would look anxiously forward to such a trip, but the Ornithologist who had never yet seen the Skuas, Razorbills, Eider Ducks, Puffins, Terns, and other Sea birds—except a straggler now and then down South on migration—in their favourite breeding haunts—and whose observations had been made for the most part in the Southern and Midland Counties—looks upon such a journey as a fascinating and instructive one.

We embarked from Aberdeen on the good Steamer “St. Giles” of the Orkneys, making Lerwick our destination. On the way up—the passage occupying about sixteen hours—several Guillemots and Razorbills occasionally presented themselves, but at the approach of the vessel they instantly dived, turning almost a complete somersault before going down, the white base of the tail being just discernible above the surface.

Lerwick was reached in due time, and here the Gulls were so tame that numbers of them perched like so many Guildhall Pigeons on the roofs and chimneys, while others were swimming round the landing stage, or floating in the harbour.

Lerwick—the Capital of the Island—is about 230 miles from Aberdeen, and it is interesting to note a few particulars about this northerly station before we proceed further. It is more than 200 years old, the houses are arranged in the most hap-hazard manner, and the streets are flagged and extremely narrow. The backs of many of the houses have steps leading



NEST AND EGGS OF MEADOW PIPIT.

down to the water's edge, 'which was very handy in the smuggling days.'

The population at the last census was 3,930. There are three hotels, and many private lodging houses, as well as three banks and several imposing public buildings. The water supply is obtained from a Loch about four miles away.

At the North end is Fort Charlotte, built by Oliver Cromwell, restored by Charles II, and further extended and repaired in 1781, when it was given its present name after the Queen of George III. It is now occupied by the Coastguard and Naval reserve, there being two batteries and a fine Drill Hall. Behind Fort Charlotte are the County Buildings and Prison. To the South of the town is the Anderson Institute and Widows' Asylum, founded by the late Arthur Anderson, a native of the Island. He represented the County in Parliament from 1847 to 1852. Here also is the Town Hall, built in Gothic style, the stone used being obtained entirely from native quarries. The stained glass windows of the Hall and Staircase—the majority of which were presentations—represent the history of the Islands from the earliest times, and on the walls are portraits of eminent Shetlanders.

During June the harbour is alive with Dutch vessels, which come for the Herring Fishing. The fishery is carried on very largely throughout the Islands, and the catches are very great, especially in Unst—one of the North Isles—where the barrels used in packing the cured fish may be seen in thousands, the process of salting being conducted by young women from Aberdeen and Fraserburgh.

About a mile from Lerwick is the Loch of Clickimin containing the ruins of a Pictish Burgh, whilst many similar remains are scattered over the Islands, the most perfect being that on Mousa, a small Island in Mousa Sound, some twelve miles distant from the Capital.

On Clickimin Loch can be seen colonies of the beautiful Arctic Tern, known to the natives as the Tarrock. This Tern—with the forked tail, scarlet bill and feet—has the appearance of a large Swallow, and is called in many localities the Sea Swallow. When fishing, their actions are always full of interest: hovering over the water, first one and then another may be



ROSEATE AND ARCTIC TERNS, NESTS, EGGS, AND YOUNG.

seen to drop suddenly like a stone on any small fish swimming near the surface, the birds immediately rising to repeat the process. The nests are mere hollows amongst the stones and short grass, lined with a small quantity of withered herbage. The eggs—which number two or three—are subject to endless variety, from a ground colour of white, light blue, or pale yellow, to green and brown, with brown to blackish-brown spots. These remarks will be best followed by an inspection of the pictures here presented.

Scalloway has a population of about 500. It has a semi-circular Bay round which houses are dotted; it was formerly the Shetland Capital, but has long since given way to the more populous Lerwick.

The fine ruins of its four-storied Castle—owned by the Earl of Zetland—overlook the Bay from an imposing edifice. It is interesting to observe that it was erected by Earl Patrick Stuart in 1600 by the forced labour of the poor islanders, and is the only Castle in the Shetlands with the exception of that of Muness in Unst, and the Manor House of Jarlshop, Dunrossness, built by Earl Robert.

In the garden of West Shore are some fine old Sycamores, and just above the village is Gallowshill, where witches and criminals were executed in by-gone days. In the neighbourhood of Scalloway the smell of decaying fish is overpowering, the atmosphere being quite permeated, and altogether neutralizes the salubrious effect of the ozone.

The Golden Plover is plentiful throughout the Island, and the birds have a very peculiar way of enticing one away from the nest. Their cry at this season is something after the sound produced by a flute, and on first hearing it one imagines the birds are quite near, whereas they are a few hundred yards away. The nest is merely a slight hollow, lined with a few sticks of heather. Four is the usual number of eggs, and the colour is a dull olive-green—sometimes creamy-white or yellowish brown—spotted and blotched with deep brown and purplish-grey.

Numerous Curlews were seen on the same ground as the last mentioned variety, but this latter bird is more wary than the Golden Plover, for during incubation the male is ever on the alert, and he can observe the approach of anyone long



LESSER TERNS, NEST, EGGS AND YOUNG.

before he himself can be seen. With the cries he makes acting as a signal, he is joined by others, and the noisy birds soar, screaming overhead in every direction. The Curlew is the Sentinel of the Sea-shore and mud flats, as the screaming Jay is of the thick impenetrable thicket. The nest is generally lined with grass and a little moss; the number of eggs is three or four. The colour is dull drab, with blotches of dark brown, and the size is large in comparison with the bird. The Shetlanders—whose chief food and living is that of, and after, fish and birds—regard with horror the idea of using such a bird as the Curlew for food.

The Isle of Noss is about five miles from Lerwick, and it is noted for its majestic sea-cliffs and the countless numbers of birds which frequent it. The Keeper's House is the only residence on the Island and the highest precipice is 900 feet.

Looking down we observe that every available ledge is occupied by nests of the Kittiwake and other species. When viewed from the summit of the cliff the scene is indescribably wild, thousands of birds swimming about and equal numbers hovering above the sea below, the whole producing an impression not readily effaced from the memory. This is surely a Bird Lover's Paradise. The little Kittiwake Gull is readily distinguished by its unmistakable note of 'Kitty-a-wake', and in the same manner as the Cuckoo it is constantly uttering its own name, thus rendering a mistake on our part an impossibility. They build their nests much lower down the rocks than the Guillemots and very often in places where nothing but a bird could reach, or keep a foot-hold. The nest consists of dry grass and seaweed, mixed with clay, which no doubt gives weight and adhesion to the rock. They lay three eggs which are subject to much variation.

It may not generally be known that there are two distinct varieties of the Guillemot found abundantly throughout the Islands, namely, the Common and the Ringed species. The former is met with on the precipitous rocks of all the Islands. They sit high and lightly on the water, and as a boat approaches dive with the rapidity of thought. One pear-shaped egg is laid which varies in an extraordinary manner, indeed no two eggs are said to be alike. Unlike most other Sea birds they sit on their eggs upright, and with the back to the sea, thus hiding the conspicuous white breast.

The Razorbill is especially interesting as being the nearest surviving relation of the now extinct Great Auk, whose eggs are worth more than their weight in gold. The Razorbill is distinguished from the Guillemot by its much darker upper plumage and broad bill, having a white stripe across the centre. A single egg is laid, which varies a great deal in colour, being white or brown, boldly blotched with liver-brown or greyish-brown. No green of any shade is present on the egg, yet when held up to the light the inside of the shell is of a beautiful pea-green.

The Green Cormorant may be told by the crest on the head of the male and the brilliant metallic green and bronze plumage of both sexes. One cannot, moreover, mistake their harsh scream, and the call notes of 'kree', 'kraw', or 'krell.' Their nests are built of sea-weed with a lining of dry grass, and are placed low down on the rocks, generally on ledges where the cliff overhangs, so that to reach them one must descend by a rope or climb the rock from the bottom. They build in company and carry the whitening of their dwellings to such an extent that the cliffs on which they build may be seen a mile or more away. The eggs are four or five in number, have a greenish shell, covered over with a soft chalky substance. When first laid they are quite white, but soon become stained by the birds wet feet, and the materials of which the nest is composed. These eggs are never eaten even by the poorest of the inhabitants.

The Oystercatcher is distinguished from all other Sea bird's by its black and white plumage, long vermilion bill, and pale red legs and feet. Although termed Oystercatcher, it never feeds on oysters, its food consisting of small shellfish for the most part, also shrimps, sea-worms and other crustaceans. The nest—if such it can be called—is peculiar, consisting of a cavity in the pebbly beach, lined with small flat pieces of stone or fragments of broken shells. Three or four eggs are laid, but rarely the latter. The ground colour is buff, spotted or streaked with dark blackish-brown and pale grey.

The Herring Gull is very common and is to be identified by its large size and pale grey upper plumage. The eggs of this variety are exactly similar to those of the Lesser Black Backed Gull, and as the two often nest together, it is necessary

to watch the birds to their nests in order to get authentic specimens. The nests are large and formed of dry grass, mixed with heather, and sometimes sea-weed. The three eggs vary in colour from pale bluish-green to olive-brown, spotted with dark and light brown and grey.

The Eider Duck—called in the Shetlands, the Dunter—is a thorough bird of the sea, only coming to land for the purpose of rearing its young. It loves to frequent precipitous islands and small uninhabited sea-girt rocks, breeding on them and obtaining its food in the surrounding sea. Their nests are large and consist of dry grass, bits of sea-weed—sometimes with heather twigs intermixed—warmly lined with down from the parent's breast, which is gradually accumulated during the time the eggs are being laid. The usual number of eggs is from five to seven, and they are pale olive green.

The work of nest building and incubation is left entirely to the female, and as is usual with the Duck tribe, the more gaudily attired male keeps away from the nest, although in the case of the Eider, he joins his mate when she leaves the nest for food, and at such times the pair may be seen swimming round the rocks side by side. Before leaving the nest, the eggs are carefully covered up. The down forms a valuable article of commerce, each Duck yielding about four ounces, which, when cleaned, is worth about £1 per lb.

Another characteristic bird of these Islands is the Great Black Backed Gull. This beautiful member of the Gull family is only equalled in size by the Glaucous Gull and it may be seen at all seasons and in all weathers, soaring, Eagle-like, far overhead. They are very careful to select as nesting sites those Islands which are very difficult of access, either from the precipitous character of their rocky sides or from their being surrounded by the waters of some inland lake, where no craft ever penetrates. They breed in great numbers on the Holm of Noss, an isolated rock some thirty feet from the main Island.

The nest is built of dry grass—carelessly heaped up—and the usual number of eggs is three. They are often similar to those of the Lesser Black Backed Gull and the Herring Gull, but are generally marked with larger blotches and are considerably



· A PAIR OF LAPWINGS, NEST, EGGS AND YOUNG.

larger. The eggs of this variety are very rich and excellent to eat. This Gull causes a deal of trouble and extra watching during lambing season as they will instantly kill a lamb and make off with it to their nesting sites.

Colonies of Richardson's Skuas are found in Unst, Foula, Yell, and Feltar. They frequent those districts which are low and marshy, laying their eggs upon some slight eminence of dry ground. They are the merciless persecutors of the other species of sea birds in the neighbourhood, sucking their eggs, and giving the parents no end of trouble when they are bringing home their food. They attack them until they are forced to give up what they are carrying to their families and have perforce to go in search of more. The nest is merely a depression in the heath or moss, upon which the eggs are laid, and these are always two. The colour is olive or reddish-brown, spotted with dark brown and grey.

Now we come to the Island of Foula—on the West side of the Shetland mainland, from the nearest point of which it is about 18 miles distant. The natives of the Island are very primitive, the majority being crofters, living in small thatched huts—over which cords are passed with heavy stones suspended on either side to prevent the roofs from being blown away during the fierce gales, which are so prevalent in the Island. They have no fire-places, a pile of peat being burned in the centre of the floor, and the smoke wanders about the room until it finds its way out through a hole in the roof, which serves the double purpose of a chimney and window. Cows and poultry often share the same dwelling!

Shetland alone amongst the British Islands is the resort of the Great Skua during the breeding season, having now only two stations in the whole group, namely, Foula and Hermaness in Unst, where they are strictly protected by the proprietors. The bird was formerly plentiful on the low ground near Rona's Hill, in North Mavin, as well as Saxaford, in Unst, but they have deserted owing to the want of protection. The number of eggs laid is two, and these are a dark, buffish-brown, spotted with dark brown. The nest consists of a neatly rounded cavity in the moss and heather, measuring about a foot in diameter, and is lined with small pieces of heather, moss and

dry grass. These birds are considered by the inhabitants to be the protectors of their flocks against the Eagles, the King of Birds not being allowed to 'lord it' in their domain.

The Lapwing—a bird so well-known in the South—is also found inhabiting these Islands. Its captivating flight—wheeling round and round, then rising and falling in graceful curves and twistings—is known to all dwellers in the country. In the representation given the three eggs will be seen to harmonise to a nicety with the surroundings, whilst in the bottom left-hand corner a young fledgling will be observed crouching down in amongst the herbage. The one bird stationary, and the other in the air makes a most delightful picture.

There are a good many more birds to be seen on these Islands, both sea and land birds, among them being the Puffin, Fulmar Petrel, Manx Shearwater, Stormy Petrel, Wheatear, Whitethroat, Wren, Meadow Pipit, Rock Pipit, Swallow, Twite, Corn Bunting, Skylark, Starling, Hooded Crow, Raven, Short Eared Owl, Kestrel, Shag, Gannet, Wild Duck, Teal, Wigeon, Goldeneye, Rock Dove, Corncrake, Common Snipe, Dunlin, Common Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Black Headed Gull, Red Throated Diver, and last, but not least, the ubiquitous House Sparrow.

JUST BEFORE DUSK.

THERE is probably nothing more beautiful or fascinating than to be alone with Nature when the golden-red beams of the setting sun have faded away in the far West until the dawn of another Summer's day.

The air is not particularly cold, but at times a chilliness comes over one as the mist rises over the woodland glen, but above us all is clear, and on the horizon two or three bright twinkling stars set off the scene to perfection. The tall giant Oak and Fir trees are just discernible, standing out as vast evidences of Nature's wonderful works of art and delicacy. The Bramble bushes, with the clinging, sweet-smelling Honeysuckle, the Oak saplings, the brown sun-dried Ferns, the Nut Hazel trees, and other wondrous botanical specimens are all around us as we stand on the summit of the hillside, watching and waiting for the coming night.

Dashing close to us, almost touching, the Bat flits past: twilight would certainly be far from complete without this curious creature with its Mouse-like features and strange flight. Secreted during the day in some secluded hiding place, at night he duly makes his appearance.

'Beneath the frowning brow of night he spreads his wings.
And on his cycles never sings one feeble note, but whirs a fright:
 Into the gloom how prone to dart,
 At dawn how quick to hie away;
 He loves the darkness from his heart,
 With all his heart he hates the day.'

A large Beetle or Moth goes across the face and somewhat startles the casual observer as the cry is uttered, "What was that?" but the Naturalist looks for such intrusion, and is not satisfied unless he gets it.

At the hour of twilight in the month of May, the Nightjar.

may be heard uttering its peculiar warble; then wheeling round and round, darting and stooping, and with its large Hawk-like mouth dexterously catching any insect which is on its night excursions. Woe betide any such insect, for in an amazing short space of time this bird will have captured many hundreds of these creatures; yet another farmer's friend!

A curious bird, indeed, the Goatsucker—as the bird is called in some localities owing to the ridiculous idea that it is very injurious to weanling calves, inflicting, as it strikes at them, a fatal distemper known by the name of puckeridge! Even in the days of the revered Gilbert White—with whom the history of Selborne will ever be associated—the superstition—for I can call it nothing else—existed, and to this day there are those who persecute the bird therefor.

'Hoot, Hoot,' and the Owl comes forth to tell its tale. The Barn Owl, Long Eared, or Tawny species, perchance. Four varieties breed in the British Isles at the present time; the three already enumerated and the Short Eared Owl. A country rustic once said to me that the work of the Kestrel during the daytime is taken up by the Owls at night, and the country rustic is undoubtedly right. Would that there were other country rustics who had the same correct opinion of Owls.

Seen very rarely during the day, the Owls content themselves with sleeping the sleep of the righteous, and dreaming of the delights of darkness.

The Glow-Worm relieves the scene with its curious light; a restless Sheep or two in the distant folds produces the gentle lullaby caused by the tinkling of the bells; and the delicious strains of the Nightingale poured forth with such melodious sweetness from the shadowy stillness of its embowered retreat, is enthralling. It may be news to many to know that the Nightingale also sings during the day, but its song—mingled with the voices of other birds—is less captivating than when listened to during the twilight and moonlight hours.

The moon slowly makes its appearance overhead; its light aids the weary traveller on his way, and enables us to discern the late hours which are being kept by a flight of Wild Ducks and half-a-dozen Herons, and the moving of some restless Rooks in their roost trees. Secreted all around us in



A PAIR OF MAGPIES AND NEST.

the tall trees are birds of every description, patiently waiting for the break of day. Very contented they seem to be, a most peaceful community.

A Pheasant is startled by us and utters its alarm cry, which contrasts very strangely with the croaking of a Frog in the undergrowth, or the chirping of a Cricket. The scene is beautiful by reason of its solemnity and stillness.

Amongst the reeds and willows the Sedge Warbler may be heard, and possesses the art of mimicry in a wonderful degree, and suspended in mid-air, even at this hour, the Woodlark utters its anthem of praise.

The air is redolent with the sweet aroma of Primroses and Hyacinths, Cowslips and Lilies of the Valley, but we dare not venture on to the dewy mead for the reason that the Adder may find us unprepared to encounter him, a dangerous customer to deal with even in the daylight.

Philomel, with his dark, lustrous eyes, is creeping about in the thick Bramble bush—which will soon be covered with pliant branches of Dog-Roses—to reach which we climb the moss-covered bank, bespattered and bejewelled with gorgeous Dog-Violets, which glisten brightly in the moonlight.

Then all is still for a time until some proud cock in the farmyard takes time by the forelock and starts crowing. Perhaps it was awakened by the closing of a lattice-gate by some returning lover, or, perhaps again, he is very anxious for daylight and has become restless.

Darkness steals on apace, and Nature assumes the robe of night; the surroundings become quieter every moment; all creatures are safely harboured in their respective dwelling places, and we turn our footsteps homeward. The solemnity has made its impression upon us; our voices sound very weird and out of place in the dewy stillness, and then no sound is heard,

‘Save where the beetle wheels its droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds,’

JUNE.



A RAIDER OF BIRDS' NESTS.

NATURE IN JUNE.

I.

THE month of June has many pleasant associations. True the season for the Maypole dance has passed, and it is not always that the Hawthorn is forward enough to be taken advantage of by the rosy-cheeked May girls, but by the last two weeks of the fifth month and the first week in June the bloom is usually abundant. June is almost certain to have its May, but May is not always so certain of its perfected Hawthorn blossoms, and when it is not forthcoming by the First the Blackthorn is used in its stead, but there remains something lacking when the true signs of the fifth month are missing. It is pleasing even in June to think of the lasses bespattered with the beautiful snow-white blossoms, and sometimes with golden Crowfoots and Marsh Marigolds. It is a glorious contrast this bright silver and gorgeous gold.

A phenomenally warm day in February is welcome, Nature in April is glorious, a May morning is exquisite; but June, leafy June, far outshines them all. Why? By this time our Summer visitors have arrived and settled down to peaceful enjoyment of their six months' sojourn amongst us. The last of our migrants reached us in the ordinary course by the middle of May—the Swift, Flycatcher, Landrail, and Nightjar.

The Swallow now skims over the surface of the river and the pool, and rises and falls gracefully through the crowded thoroughfares with marvellous rapidity: the gentle House Martin under the eaves utters its pleasant, though feeble, warble, and no bird is more conscious of protection.

As one rambles across the glorious green pastures—the beaten track winding along in curious zig-zag lines—one inhales the



NEST AND EGGS OF GREENFINCH.

cool, sweet breath of early morn and the scented hedgerows. How lovely the hedges, and the solitary snow-white bush in the centre of a green meadow! Twittering and fluttering over the topmost twigs of this sunlit hedgerow the Blackcap appears. I venture to think the most ignorant or casual observer could not mistake this bird as one resident in our Country the whole year through. With the ashy-grey underparts, the slightly darker back, and the black cap from which it derives its name, it flits about in a playful skirmish, pouring out its joyous melodies, which some Naturalists consider superior to the Nightingale.

An illustration of the nest and eggs of the Hawfinch has already been given, but Mr. Webster has presented us with a very life-like study of the parent birds, a young fledgling and four eggs. One of the parent birds is in the act of feeding its first hatched fledgling with a fine fat grub or insect of some description.

All along the banks and ditches, the Greater and Lesser Stitchworts are still in their beauty, whilst the foliage of the now drooping Anemones pleasingly contrasts with the fading mass of Wild Hyacinths. Even the pale Primroses have not yet all bid us adieu, and Cowslips abound in the copses and on the sloping railway banks; whilst Oxeye Daisies are making very rapid headway. In one way I often feel pleased to hear of a railway extension, for the reason that the well kept hawthorn hedges which form the boundaries on either side, are excellent sanctuaries for our wild birds to build in and bring up their fledglings unmolested and undisturbed.

On the hillside the green pastures are be-jewelled with Daisies, like bright stars in a verdant firmament. What highly prized flowers these latter would be were they not so plentiful! Then there is the Speedwell, pretty little blue flowers whose petals are a study worthy of an artist's brush: or the Heartsease in the corn-field, with its wonderful colourings by the Master Painter. Not far from this spot we may have the good fortune to find the nest of that scorner of the ground, the Skylark. A very difficult nest to find, and one can be very easily lured away by the bird. Three or four dark eggs—about the size of a House Sparrow's—lie in the cup, whilst they are sometimes placed in the footprint of a horse or cow.



A PAIR OF HAWFINCHES, NEST, EGGS AND YOUNG.



NEST AND EGGS OF PHEASANT.

Any essay on Nature would be far from complete without allusion to the song of this bird. Even Marie Corelli in her fascinating book "The Mighty Atom" could not refrain from mentioning it, and beautifully depicts the scene thus:—There sailed a stray bit of fleecy cloud, here flew a swift-winged swallow, and immediately above him, quivering aloft among the sunbeams like a jewel suspended in mid-heaven, carolled a lark, with all that tender joyousness which has inspired one of the sweetest of our English poets to write of it thus: —

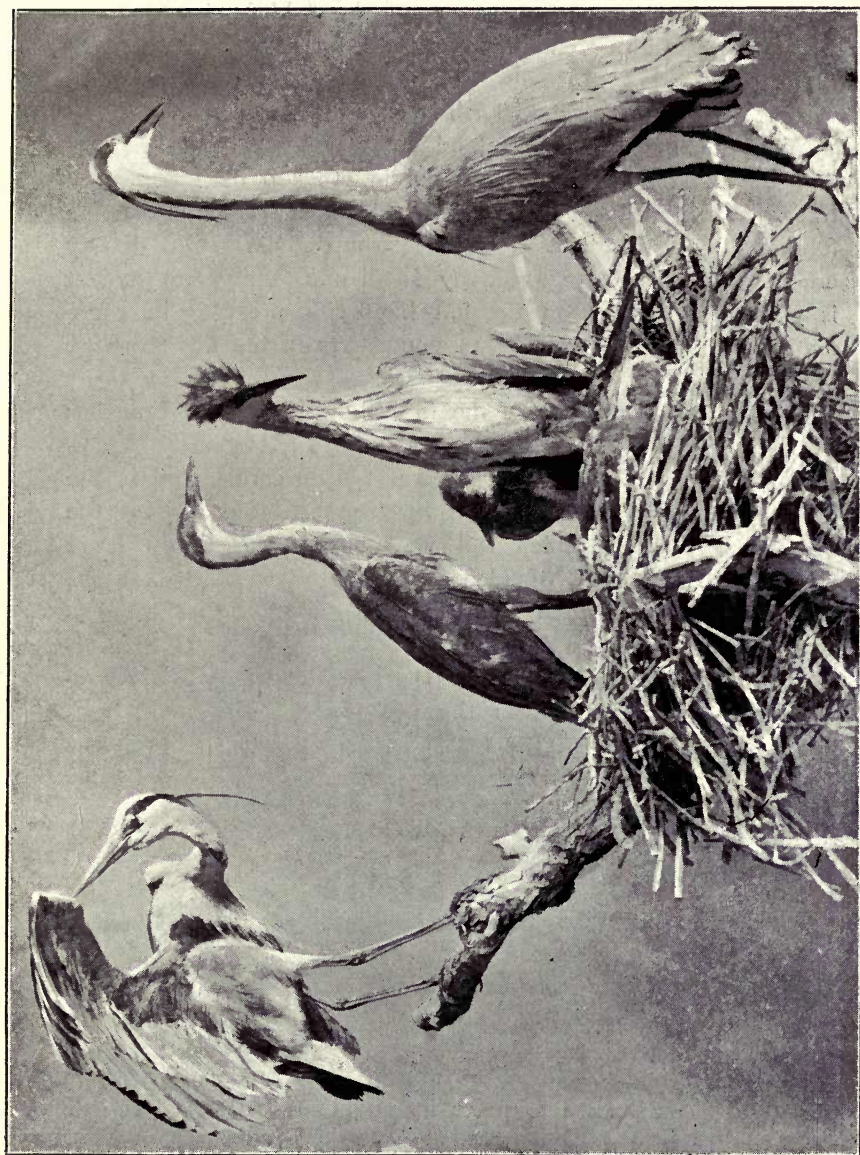
'From out the roseate cloud, athwart the blue,
I hear thee sound anew
That song of thine a-shimmering down the sky,
And daisies, touched thereby,
Look up to thee in tears which men mistake for dew.

Thou hast within thy throat a peal of bells,
Dear dainty fare-thee-wells.
And like a flame dost leap from cloud to cloud:
Is't this that makes thee proud?
Or is't that nest of thine, deep hidden in the dells?

Marie Corelli quotes further stanzas from the writer of these delightful verses—Eric Mackay—but I have selected the two which in my opinion are the most beautiful.

In all these sweet songs about the Lark we must not, however, forget the other sights and sounds on a June morning. Sylvan scenes abound with joy and happiness after the warm refreshing rains, the earth teems with insect life, the air is resonant with the songs of innumerable happy birds. Shady nooks, ferny dales, and the whole woodland rings with the fluty notes of Blackbird or Thrush.

Running nimbly up the venerable oak—which is covered with beautiful silver lichen, interspersed with other gorgeous hues—the Squirrel is seen. So soon as he reaches a fork in the tree, down he squats on his hind quarters, and with his keen eye watches our movements. Then, observing us moving, he again ascends to the next storey, and on again, until we lose sight of him as he skims along the highest twigs from tree top to tree top with wonderful agility. Whilst watching here, we notice some newly-bored holes in a fir tree, and on tapping the



A PAIR OF HERONS, NEST AND YOUNG.

trunk a Green or Lesser Spotted Woodpecker darts out and off into the thicket. Very secure from the intruder or nest-robber are the eggs and young of these birds, inasmuch as without hand-saw or chisel it is practically impossible to reach them. The eggs alone—which in colour are of a beautiful opaque, glossy white—call forth our admiration.

What a study it is to stand right underneath a Heronry and watch the huge parent birds flying to and from their nest trees. What a fine fellow the male bird is may best be followed by an inspection of the group given. One hardly credits that this large company is all one family, but such it is. Notice the bird on the left hand side preening its wing-feathers, and the huddled up youngsters in the flat structure of sticks and twigs.

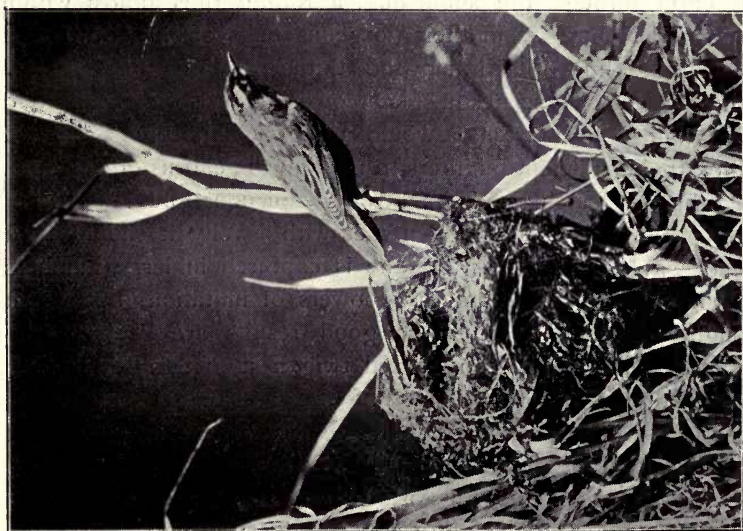
On the low branches of the firs, above the pliant branches overhanging the pathways, the Lesser and Greater White-throats may be heard uttering sweet little carols, and in the bushes we may find a Hedge Sparrow's nest containing the egg of a Cuckoo, which will very soon hatch into a large nestling. A feeling of pleasure steals over one when the Cuckoo's egg is lighted upon, probably because it is not a common occurrence, although my Ornithological diary reminds me of a certain lucky day in Bedfordshire when I found no fewer than six, all laid in the nest of the bird mentioned. Occasionally two eggs are found in the same nest, but it has yet to be ascertained whether they are both laid by the same Cuckoo.

The colourings of the eggs of this interesting bird vary a great deal, but I have never yet come across such specimens as are located in the Natural History Museum at South Kensington, where are exhibited, among others, three Cuckoo's eggs similar in colour to those of the birds in whose nests they were laid, namely, the Hedge Sparrow, Pied Flycatcher, and Redstart, all of whose eggs are blue; a wonderful diversity indeed, and one which requires a deal of explanation. The bird has been known to place its egg in the nests of 120 or more varieties.

At the foot of a hill in the woodland glen, a silent pool is found, and peeping above the surface are Rushes of various



SEDGE WARBLER AND NEST.



REED WARBLER AND NEST.

hues. The sunlight just reaching one corner has a charming effect, and shows off to perfection the glories of light and shade. Perchance the nests of the Sedge and Reed Warbler may here be found, illustrations of both of which are given on the previous page. The Reed Warbler's nest is much deeper than that of its relation and is wonderfully secured between the stems of reeds, while the Sedge Warbler—that inimitable English Mocking Bird—builds by no means a wonderful structure, yet it is tidy and neat.

The Pied Wagtail should here be seen disporting itself, and often very unlooked-for varieties pay a visit to the brink of the pool to quench their thirst, preparatory to taking part again in the great orchestra of Nature. A Linnet may look in from the commons, or even a Nuthatch may come down from his perch on the tree tops, then back again, and proceed to call his mate by his peculiar whistle. Passing on, the scene grows more beautiful: the clean crisp fir balls and the old needles of the firs and pines, shed upon the ground, make a smoothly carpeted way.

The blue sky is just discernible through the trees, and the rays of the sun peeping through here and there throw light upon the shining leaves of Holly or Nut Hazel. A startled Jay darts through the sunbeams; a Rabbit runs almost within touch; Bees buzz by in their gorgeous belts of blue, Butterflies of dazzling hue flit hither and thither. Many times have I witnessed such a scene in beauteous Bedfordshire, and stood meditating as to how long it would last. The handsome Goldfinch still exists in sufficient numbers to take up the chorus of welcome, and the Chaffinch is frequently conspicuous, but the other Finch—Bully—is not so often met with. Why it should be I cannot say, unless it is that he is captured in large numbers for the sake of his well-known powers of imitation, but if not brought up from the nest no good results are likely to be obtained. The beautiful root and twig nest of this Finch, with occasionally a sparing lining of black hair, is well worth illustrating and Mr. Newman has supplied us with excellent materials for reproduction, as will be seen.

Having reached the outskirts of the wood, we come to the open country. Running right up to the hedgerow is a corn-



NEST AND EGGS OF BULLFINCH.

field, the gentle breeze tossing to and fro the shimmering blades. A few Rooks lazily winging their way homewards cast curious shadows on the meadows. Suddenly a Redstart takes up its position on the topmost twigs, showing off with evident pride its flame-coloured tail feathers. Probably in some out-house or barn the nest may be found, containing seven pale blue or green eggs, and how assiduously this bird attends to its young! In a carpenter's shop I found a nest which was placed on a ledge near the roof, the bird entering the building through a hole which at some time or other had been made for the insertion of a stove pipe. In and out the whole day long the parent birds passed. A curious hissing noise is made by the young.

On buoyant wings the Tree Pipit is seen. Having reached a certain height he descends rapidly, alighting for the most part, though not always, on to the branch of a tree, and ever singing. The haughty Swans by the willows have a couple of eggs in the nest, which consists of aquatic plants, such as rushes and reeds. Five or six more eggs have to be laid to complete the clutch. It is the largest egg laid by any bird now breeding in our country.

It is pleasing to observe the attention which is now being given by the Press to Natural History. Thus encouraged, the study is making very rapid headway, and surely there is no stronger safeguard against frittering away the energies of the brain than the early cultivation of a sensible hobby. Keeping the mind occupied helps one considerably, and parents would do well to encourage their growing children to set out in the shape of written thought their ideas on topics which engross their juvenile attention. The study of Nature is one which should afford pleasure, impart useful information, and sow seeds of culture in the garden of the mind.

Miss Jekyll in her delightful book "Wood and Garden" beautifully writes of June, thus:—

"June is here—thank God for lovely June! The soft cooing of the wood-dove, the glad song of many birds, the flitting of butterflies, the hum of all the little winged people among the branches, the sweet earth scents all seem to say the same, with endless reiteration, never wearying because so gladsome,"



A PAIR OF MUTE SWANS NEST AND EGGS.

and, then again, to quote S. Reynolds Hole:—"The bees were working in and out of their hives, like busy men in the City, and butterflies were flirting among the flowers, like idle men in the Park."

England may well be proud of sermon-writers such as those whose sweet and delightful word-pictures I have just quoted.

NATURE IN JUNE.

II.

RALPH Waldo Emerson has said, "There are no half hinges in Nature." But what a delightful month is June, half hinges or otherwise! By now the whole land of England has become a fairy garden, May has blossomed into June. Each morning I walk through a corn-field, and notice the "throwing up" of the ear-blades, and the hay waving ripe for the mower. Right on the edge of the path four young Skylarks are seen, almost ready to fly, or soar to the skies above. The male bird is still in song, he sings right through the breeding season.

Many birds are silent at this important season, but among others which are not may be mentioned the Robin, Wren, Chaffinch, Willow Wren, Song Thrush, Hedge Sparrow, White-throat, and Blackcap. The Nightingale ceases its song when the young are hatched, but should they be taken and another nest is built, he re-assumes again.

The hundreds of Grasses must only receive a passing note. We pick up a handful just laid low by the mower's scythe, and remark that many grasses yield excellent corn, and that it is from these that the bread we eat has been cultivated.

This is the month of Roses, and the season being late, the Hawthorn has not yet lost its snowy sheen. What a fine background, too, is the light green of the corn shoots for the Scarlet Poppy! The seeds on the Wych Elm are dying off, but the sweet-scented Honeysuckle is coming forward apace. The three varieties of Dead Nettles—White, Red, and Yellow—make a brave show with the Hedge Stachys and the Foxgloves.

Along the hedgerows we notice the larvæ of the Froth Fly or Frog Hopper, commonly called Cuckoo Spit, and taking one in our hands pick out the greenish-yellow insect. Nestling right at our feet almost, in a briar, is a Greater Whitethroat's nest,



YOUNG SKYLARKS AND NEST.

containing four eggs, and just above in the bank a Robin's snug homestead is found with a similar number of freckled eggs, sitting hard. Not far away—by the roadside—a Partridge or Pheasant startles us, and we find the nests and eggs after a careful search.

How beautiful the Meadow Sweet hereabouts, as well as the Fly Orchis, the Buck Bean in the marshy places, and the Ragged



CUCKOO'S EGG IN NEST OF HEDGE SPARROW.

Robin. We notice the flowers of the Watercress—on top of one a Wagtail is disporting himself—a Dragon Fly whizzes by; we upheave an Earth Nut; pluck a Forget-me-not, and notice the bluish purple of the Meadow Crane's Bill, the Sweet Scented Vernal Grass, the fading Hyacinths, and the meadows one sheet of brilliant yellow with the Upright Meadow Crowfoot.

I have not yet exhausted the list, how rich we are in wild

flowers when we come to examine them. Have we not in June, too, the Periwinkle, Yellow Rattle, Bird's Foot Trefoil, the flowering Groundsel and Thistles, Goosegrass, Red and White Clover, Bladder Campion, Water Violet, Arum or Cuckoo Pint, Blue Borage, the Holly blossom, and then in the gardens the Pink, Red, and White May, Laburnum, Mountain Ash, Guelder Rose, Chestnut (Red and White), Pinks, Wall-flowers, Pansies, Canterbury Bells, Geraniums, and on and on?

Nearer the river, Marsh Mallows and Dandelions; large flaring Buttercups, Yellow Iris, and many coloured Rushes and Sedges, and porcelain petals of the Water Lilies floating on the surface of the lazy stream! There are no half hinges in Nature! But the birds, we are forgetting them in our love for flower-land. Right up in the sullen green branches of the tardy oak, or in amongst the pale lemon of the ash or the burnished red of the beech, the Chaffinch sings, and on the lower branch a Yellow Bunting utters his love song. June is famous for three bird sounds, the "bleating" of the Snipe, the "trill" of the Grass-hopper Warbler, and the "purr" of the Nightjar.

In our illustration of the Corncrake will be seen both parent birds crouching in the herbage, as well as the nest, a broken egg, and two or three of the fluffy little fledglings.

From the farmyard in the distance comes the screaming of a Guinea Fowl, and flying round—tumbling in the sunlight—we notice a score of Pigeons. Our friend who is with us has never seen that curious Beetle spit blood, when the insect itself is spat upon, and as we light upon one by the roadside we illustrate our meaning. He is dumfounded almost!

Miles away from the town or village are we now, but scampering up a chestnut tree by the wayside a large black Cat is seen. He is poaching, and many of the feathered tribe fall preys to his mauling claws. If the keeper spots him I would not give much for his life. Cats do more harm to young birds than most people imagine, especially London cats.

Passing on, we notice that it will be a good Nut year. The stems are loaded; the Field Convolvulus peeps out here and there and meets our gaze. We come across a great sprawling Cuckoo in a Hedge Sparrow's nest. The big-little bird has ejected the little-little birds with his rump, which is well-shaped



A PAIR OF CORNCRAKES, NEST, EGG AND YOUNG.

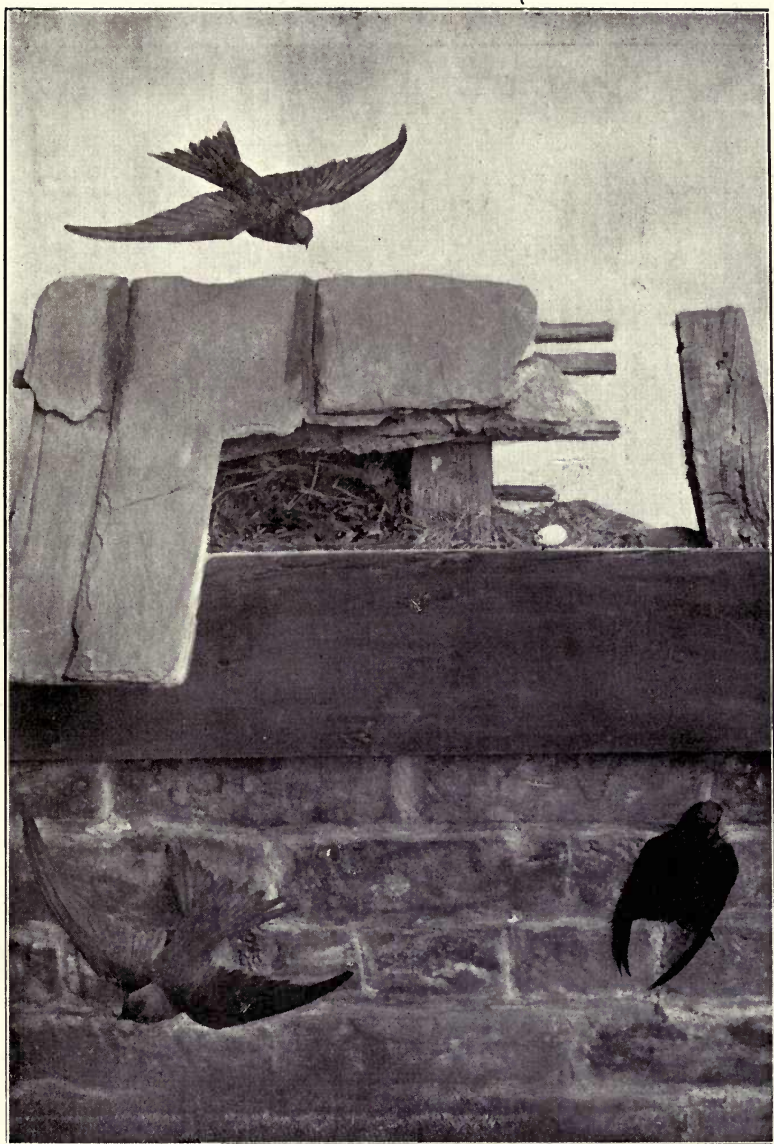
for such an operation. The cavity fills up after he has been in the world long enough to kill his foster brothers and sisters. How much more we have yet to learn about this extraordinary bird! The Cuckoo's Mate is heard from that belt of woodland; Nightingales—it is still three hours before the sun sets—were never more plentiful, and the Cuckoo is almost everywhere. We are in Hertfordshire. Are we more favoured here than elsewhere with these two birds?

The Swallows and Martins are busy round an old tumble-down barn. The nests of the Chaffinch do not look so fresh as when we last wrote, but what a delicate little home the Chiff Chaff has at the foot of a furze bush, right underneath some overhanging grasses. Six freckled eggs were in the nest, and in the bush above a Song Thrush's, containing four youngsters. The parent will not budge, what an instance of loyalty and affection.

Much more could I write, of the Blackcap's warble, the Woodpecker's ripple of laughter and the many other Warblers, but notice how silent the Titmice are! It is later now, the Swifts are out for their night-fly. Charles Witchell truly says:—"The chorus of Swifts, heard at thirty-five minutes after sunset, indicates that a group of these birds is about to rise for the accustomed night-fly in the sky, which is one of the most extraordinary phenomena in the whole region of Ornithology."

How the Swifts cling to a wall or building may be seen on a reference to the group presented on page 155. Here we see a nest full of the curious looking youngsters, a pair of birds in their flight, and a second nest containing one of the beautiful pure white eggs.

I close with a quotation from an article on fishing by "H." in the *Saturday*, it so realistically represents the closing scene, and the afterward: "The heart of the night opens, fold on fold, like a flower, fragrant with unseen meadow sweet, till suddenly the dewy sensation of approaching morning strikes across it, and you begin to see the shapes of things dimly as the light spreads up the East, changing from silver to an amber clearness in which the stars are melted, and from amber to the orange light of widening day."



SWIFTS, NESTS, EGG AND YOUNG.



A KEEPER'S HUT.

COUNTRY LIFE.

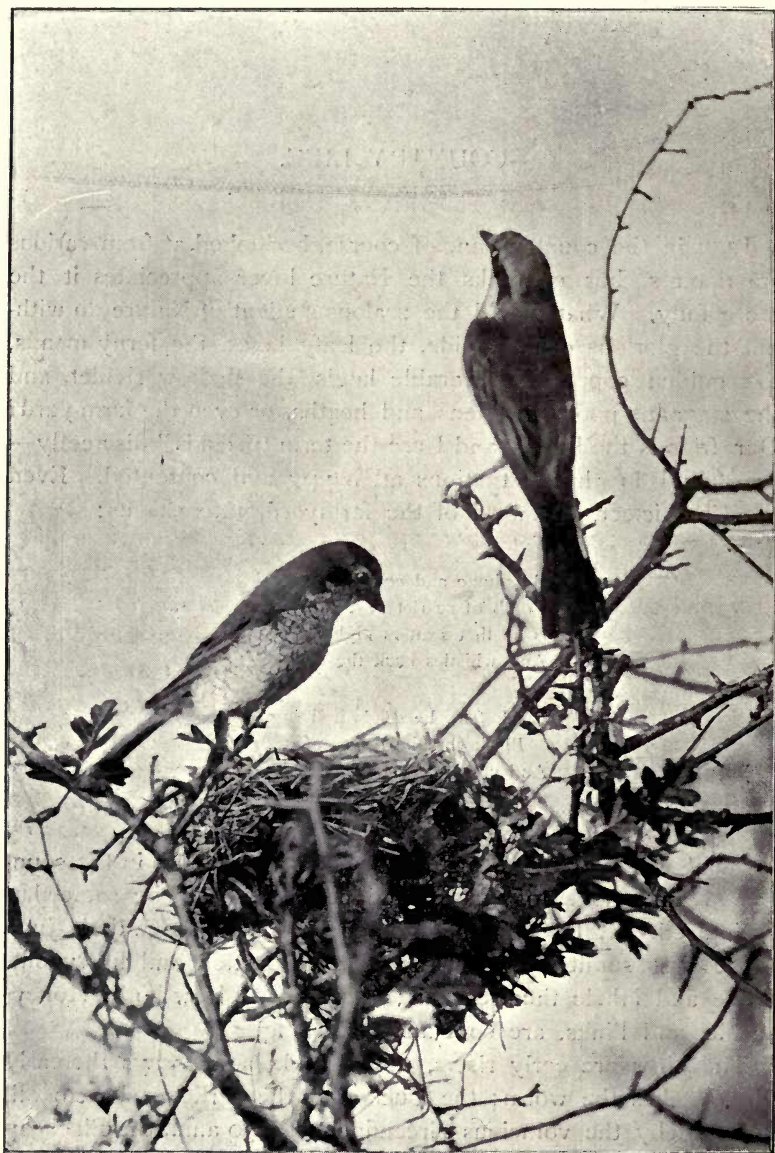
LIFE in the country can, of course, be looked at from various standpoints, but methinks the Nature lover appreciates it the more fully. What would the zealous student of Nature do without the glorious country side, the leafy lanes, the ferny meads, the golden coppice, the arable lands, the shallow rivulet, and the stagnant pool, the glens and heaths, or even the farm-yard? Our friends the birds—and I use the term “friends” discreetly—are found in these situations all happy and contented. Even the Chanticleer, that bird of the farmyard, interests us:

‘Gold plume and copper plume,
Comb of scarlet gay,
’Tis he that scatters night and gloom,
And whistles back the day.

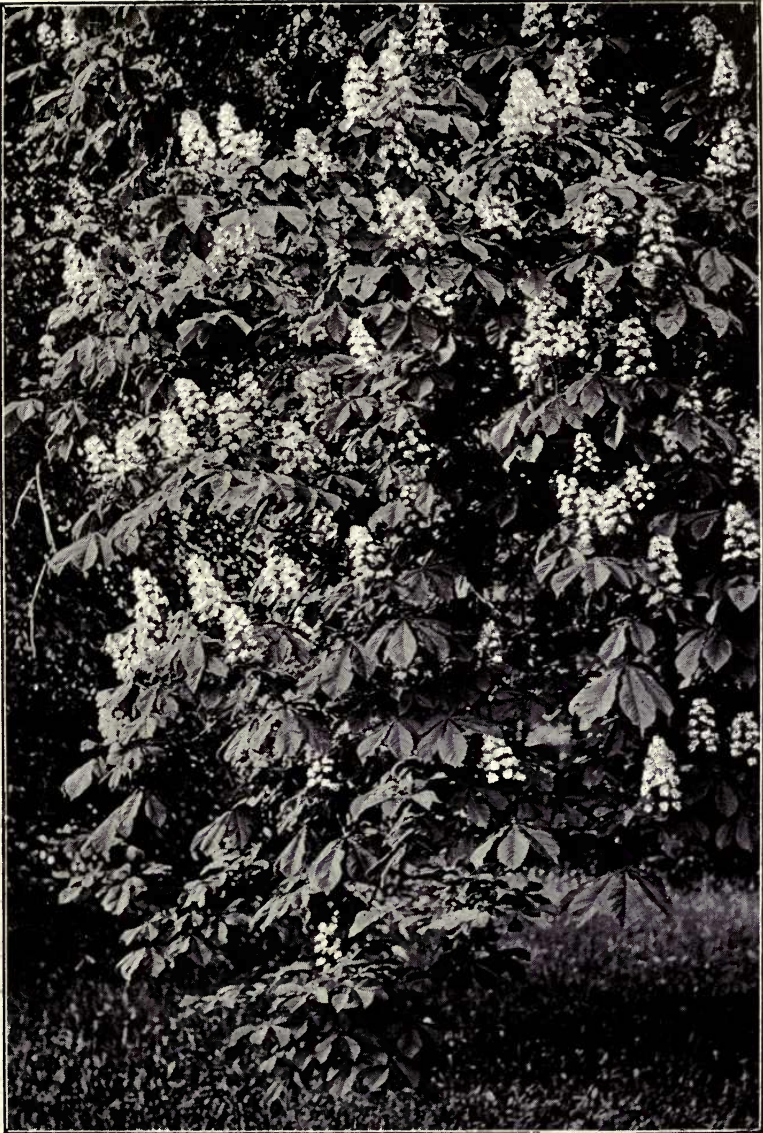
Black fear, he sends it flying,
Black care he drives afar,
And creeping shadows sighing,
Before the morning star.’

What is more interesting and enjoyable than life in the country? I am a lover of Nature and perhaps I may be somewhat prejudiced, but I watch that golden splash on the wall in June—the first sunlit beam—with great satisfaction and hurry out. I rise and inhale the fresh air; the scented Hawthorn, Honey suckle, and Pinks, are cool and refreshing.

The birds are early risers, too, the old adage says the early bird catches the worm; the Cuckoo is the earliest of them all, followed by the voracious Greenfinch at 1.30 a.m., the Blackcap at 2.30, the Quail at 3, the fluty Blackbird at 4, the Robin and the Wren at 4.30, the Thrush about 4.50, and the much despised and hated House Sparrow shortly after, then the Titmice, and the



A PAIR OF RED BACKED SHRIKES, AND NEST.



HORSE CHESTNUT IN BLOOM.

Lark a little later. To see the Lark on its first morning journey towering towards the azure sky, with its

Tirra-whee,
Tirra-lay
Day's begun,

to hear the melodious notes of our highly prized song birds; to watch the industrious Titmice as they pick the lurking insects from the fruit trees; to gaze upon the hundred and one antics of the Pied or Yellow Wagtails, affords delight to me when I think of what I am enjoying and others, less fortunate perhaps, are missing.

There is only a gentle breeze which lightly stirs the top-most twigs, while the green domes of foliage stand out clear and sharp against the blue and white of an early June sky. What would country life be without such exquisite dainties? In the gardens may be seen Iris, Purple, Yellow and White; golden rimmed Roses mingling with crimson; a patch of gorgeous Poppies, Pyrethrum, Columbine, and Narcissus bespattered with clear fresh dew-drops; Laburnum, together with budding Carnations, and rainbow Pansies.

This, too, is the season of the Chestnut blossom, White and Pink. How picturesque is the avenue of Pink Chestnuts with the green leaves, winging their way over the tops of which are a score or more Rooks about to commence their work of destroying thousands of that destructive grub, the wireworm. The depredations of the Crow often leads to the persecution of the Rook.

The Pink Chestnut is not the only evidence of pink in early June. The Double Pink May is now in its beauty, and what a great show it makes. Secreted in its thickest branches the Merle or Mavis may have a nest, containing, perchance, four or five young fledglings. The gaily-plumed Chaffinch, too, is very partial to the hawthorn, wherein he builds what is undoubtedly one of the most beautifully constructed nests of our British Birds.

Every component part of Nature is touched with tender colour, and one may emerge from the sun-scorched paths and catch the warm winds that blow across the glorious commons.



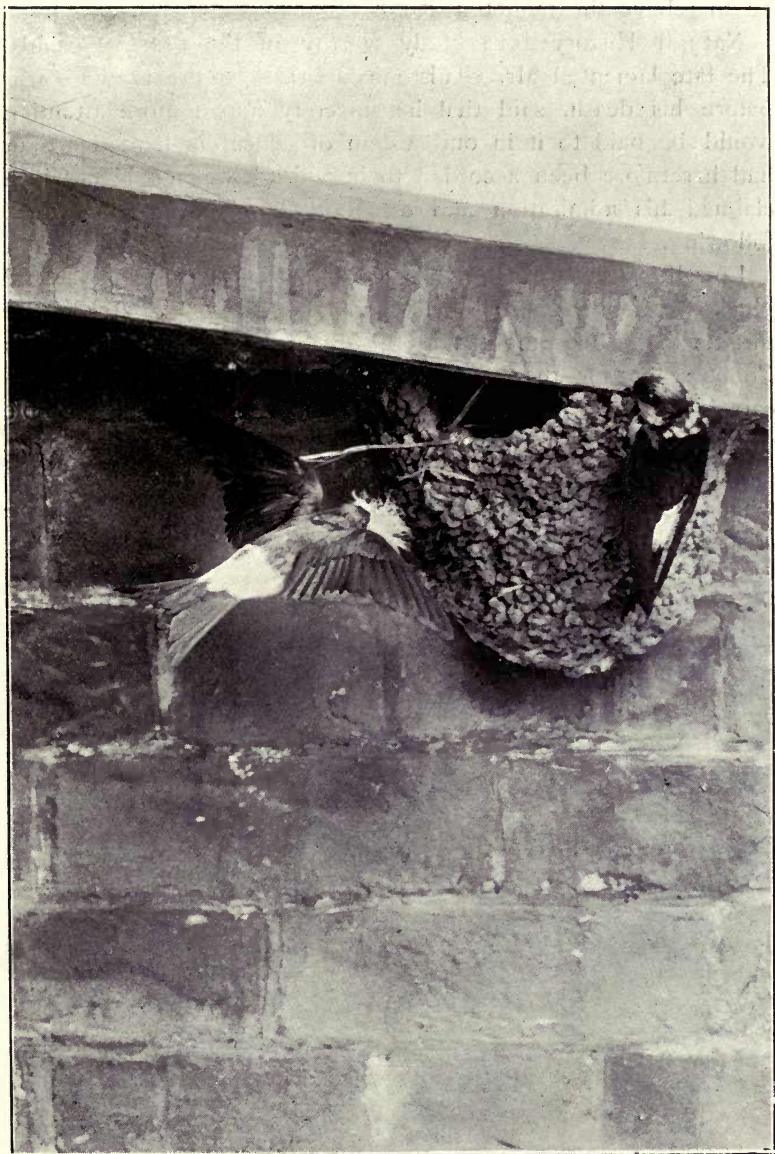
NEST AND EGGS OF WOOD WARBLER.

Under the eaves of the cottage the House Martin is busy feeding its young brood; the Swallow is dropping in the village pool, and dexterously catching myriads of insects; the Swifts have young in the welcome shelter afforded them under the roof of the village school, and the smallest of the Swallow tribe—the Sand Martin—inhabits the parish sand-pit in large numbers.

‘Over the marshes crieth a Curlew;
Wild is its music, weird is its home;
Over the desolate bits of black water,
Over the hoar, withered grass it is borne.’

To a lover of country life, how beautiful the colour of the landscape is under almost any circumstances! In Summer or Winter, by day, and also at night, there is the exhibition of hues that holds him entranced. There is the soft radiance of the dawn, and the glorious gorgeousness of the sunset. There is the luxuriance of verdure and bloom at one season, and the delicacy of the tints that fall upon the snow at another. All this beauty he who has the artist soul experiences. Without such environments the study of birds would be a very dull affair. Museums are, to an extent, welcome, but to get back again to the country-side; to study and meet our feathered pets in their natural haunts; to listen to their anthems of praise poured forth from the scented hedgerows and the woodland glens, is the Utopia of our desires.

Here we may make original observations, and others, beside ourselves, may probably profit by them. That is why we do it, or, at any rate, should do. There is a satisfaction in this knowledge which only those who worship at the shrine of Country Life appreciate to the full extent. Ornithology is, to many lovers of country life, “the Queen of Sciences,” and it fully deserves the honour. Birds, generally speaking, are our friends, and not our enemies. Without their aid, vegetation would be laid bare and desolate; minus their voices the wayside would be drear and dull; without their rainbow plumes and their sombre garbs—a cheerful intermingling—the sunshine would lose much of its lustre; without their welcome cups in the hedgerows, their presence on the fallow lands and marshes,



A PAIR OF HOUSE MARTINS AND NEST.

country life would be a very tame affair. What would there be to relieve the monotony?

Natural History is a study worthy of the greatest minds. The late lamented Mr. Gladstone in writing to me a few months before his death, said that he sincerely hoped more attention would be paid to it in our system of education hereafter than had heretofore been accorded to it, and if it was a subject which claimed his admiration and attention, surely it is one worth following.

Lowell says that "Peace is a good thing, but principle and pluck are better," and Lowell is right in a sense, but all these three should be combined in the qualifications of a Naturalist. Country life for the zealous student of Nature, is peace. In carrying out his hobby properly he exhibits pluck and a noble principle, and while we have the opportunity presented to us, let us, in order to obtain a good reputation, endeavour to be what we desire to appear, and afford protection to those creatures who cannot protect themselves.

JULY.



A FIELD OF OATS.

NATURE IN JULY.

I.

MISS Norah Hopper in some verses written on July says:—

‘Cuckoos shouting in the woods; landrails craking,
Nightingales the livelong night on thorns their songbooks making.’

Unfortunately Miss Hopper has fallen into a grave error in these two lines, for the Cuckoo does not “shout” in July, neither does the Nightingale make its songbook on thorns the livelong July night. Neither bird sings after June, although it is true I have heard the Cuckoo during the first day or two in July, and Philomel on the 30th June; the song of the latter bird was then very feeble and it gave utterance to a hoarse kind of croak. Landrails may be heard craking, it is one of the chief bird sounds in July. How curious it is to note that the Corncrake should take to the ground so much during its sojourn amongst us, and yet a migratory bird! It is with difficulty the bird is made to rise, and it delights in running through the waving cornfields rather than flying.

We have during this month been on a fishing excursion or two, and noted how pleasant it is for an angler to be a Naturalist. An angler, if he be a Nature lover too, notices and appreciates the wild life which is going on around him, and it may be as well for me to endeavour to sketch one of the delightful scenes in which I have participated.

By the way, Professor Warde Fowler, if I mistake not, merged into a Naturalist after being an angler. And what of old Izaak Walton? He did, indeed, possess a Nature soul, and well can I imagine him and listening to the Nightingale then saying: “Lord, what music hast Thou provided for the Saints in Heaven when Thou afforded to bad men such music on earth!”



YOUNG CUCKOO.



NEST OF THREE YOUNG KESTRELS IN THE DOWN.

Great Britain still possesses more species of wild fowl than any other Country, notwithstanding the fact that so much of our land is cultivated. Amongst them all I do not think there is one which is held in higher estimation by me than the sooty Moorhen. How often have I when fishing been amused and interested by this bird, and how enjoyable it is to spend a few hours in the neighbourhood which it frequents. When I served my angling apprenticeship it was always impressed upon me that the best means of getting a good basket full of fish was to throw in your line and wait for events. There are many anglers who have not the patience to do this, they rather prefer rushing up and down in their excitement and enthusiasm, frightening as they go every fish and bird that comes within range and becoming a plague and a nuisance to the old hand who is content to sit on his camp stool the whole day long, with but two or three shifts. It is the old hand—pardon the vulgarism—from whom one can glean much information as to the birds to be met with in the situations which the angler frequents. I pride myself that I too am becoming somewhat of an old hand, and as such have had many opportunities of watching those birds which unless one is prepared to study very carefully and closely it is impossible to know much about.

We are by the side of a lake fringed with various Rushes of many hues. Nearly all the surface of the water is covered with Yellow and White Water Lilies, and the rounded leaves, lying flat on the water, make an excellent stand for a Robin, which there takes up his station, or a Pied Wagtail or Reed Bunting. We throw our line in between the lilies in the hope of alighting upon a Perch hole; patience is a virtue, and if we catch no fish, cannot we worship the glorious surroundings? It is a thundery day, and the Eels are “on the run,” and the Bream—four or five pounders some of them—are on top of the water.

If there is one delightful sight in such a spot it is to watch the Swallows and Martins skimming the water, and in and out of the old mill house. How we should miss their cheery twitterings and their concerts in unison as they perch, a dozen of them together, on the moss-grown tiles of the miller's house! How their snowy breasts are set off against



YOUNG BLUE TITS.

the green and red of the slates, and how small the Sand Martin seems, and how much more mouse-coloured the plumage, as he darts in and out of this ever-busy bird company! The Swifts, too, join them just before sunset, and all four varieties agree most harmoniously together. The latter bird is in no way related to the Swallow tribe.

At one end the lake skirts a wood, at the other end it breaks off into a clear, crystal stream, where later in the day we find the speckled Trout "at home."

How beautiful the Dragon-Flies are as they chase one another over the surface of the pool, and what curious looking insects settle on the hands now and then, nipping us so that we do not fall asleep! From the trees on the left comes the Chiff Chaff's welcome notes. What a brave little fellow he is to sing right from March until now! The Tree Pipit, too, is still singing, a remark which also applies to the Wren, Chaffinch, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, Whitethroat, Swallow, and House Martin, and perhaps a Thrush or Blackbird.

We must not forget the Spotted Flycatcher's curious note, too, and, watching, we observe a pair of these late comers on the boughs of an overhanging willow, dexterously catching the insects which abound over the surface of the pool. How interesting to watch their various movements, and their quick turns and evolutions; how snug is the nest which we find placed in the porch of the miller's house, containing four freckled eggs.

Gliding past us goes a Wild Duck and three young fledglings. The drake has forsaken them, for be it known that when incubation commences he retires to moult—when he assumes the garb of the female—only to come out in his flying colours again at a later stage. Coots and Moorhens abound, and please us now and again with their "crews" and "crr-ooks." We notice the now empty rush cradles which have, let us hope, safely harboured the progeny.

The giant Foxgloves in the coppice attract our attention, and the Daisies in the grass land through which we traverse are in abundance here. Here, too, in this damp and shady place, we find the Valerian, and higher up on the hillside, Hare-bells gilt with dew.

In a thorn bush by the water's edge we peep into the nest



THE HAUNT OF THE KINGFISHER.

of the Red Backed Shrike, or Butcher Bird. What an extraordinary bird this, a veritable murderer!

A Wasp goes flying by, and later on a Privet Hawk or Ghost Moth; but what pleases us most is to hear from the Game-keeper who waits upon us that he shoots nothing but that which he *knows* to be *vermin*. He has a good word for the Sparrow Hawk and the Kestrel, the little Merlin and the Ring Dove, and not a word has he to say against the Owls or the Nightjar, neither the Cuckoo, nor any of the smaller birds.

Those three saucy and mischievous members of the Crow tribe—the Jay, Magpie, and Jackdaw—he does not hold in such good repute, because of the Game eggs he misses, but, wise man that he is, he realizes that these dainties are not to be obtained all round the year, and he does *not* persecute them to any great extent.

He assures us that Kingfishers are plentiful here, and we are delighted to observe one or more pairs of these exquisite creatures ere we pluck the dewy grass towards evening to pack the golden Perch, the silver Jack and speckled Trout. The keeper is such an intelligent fellow that fishing loses its charm, and we talk of the birds. We learn that his Lordship who owns the estate is a bird protector, and woe betide anyone who destroys anything except vermin here. We learn, too, that on the estate of Lord Falmouth, in Cornwall, it is (or was) instant dismissal to anyone who shoots or traps a Peregrine Falcon. These are the gentlemen we bird lovers appreciate, for they have it in their power to carry out much lasting good for the benefit of those birds which at the present time need so much protection from the gunner and the nest robber. Would that we could meet many more such “keepers” as the one we met on this July day, he is surely a “keeper” in every sense of the word.

In a tall bush by the water side we find a Ring Dove's frail nest, containing the usual two eggs only, of a delightful white. It is rather late, but these birds are both early and late breeders.

In the old boat-house two Swallows' nests are found, each containing four eggs, not yet sitting. The fledglings will probably be left to the tender mercies of Nature's own hand, as



THE ORDER OF THE BATH.

the parents will have to search for pastures new before their brood are able to accompany them.

On this very fishing excursion a litter of Pigs was almost continually worrying me by sniffing round my basket, and one old hog had the impudence to upset the lot. Thus it is that the picture entitled "The Order of the Bath" is very appropriate for insertion in this sketch.

We pack up our rods and lines, throw in our over-stock of live bait, and trudge homewards. It is quite steaming by the water now, and the clock at the Manse strikes nine. It is just dark enough for us to see the light from the female Glow-Worm in the hedgerow as we pass along. We inhale the sweet country scents, then the lodge gates close behind us, and nought is heard but the tramping of the farmer's horse along the hard road, and as he passes we wish him a cheery "Goodnight."

NATURE IN JULY.

II.

It is a difficult task to decide as to which is the most delightful month for the lover of Nature, but after returning from a thirteen mile ramble across country on a beautiful July day, my decision has certainly a leaning towards this month although in a previous essay I was speaking of leafy June far outshining them all! True the majority of the song birds are silent by this time—most birds are when parental care commences—but nevertheless there is plenty left by the country side to interest, elevate, and amuse.

This is still the season of the Wild Roses. On the pliant branches the various pink and deep red hues hang in exquisite festoons, whilst the ground is strewn with the fragrant petals. Very fragile are these roses—to pluck them is only to waste them—their place is as Nature has chosen, and even in this position they do not remain long without shattering. Still they are beautiful, and he who has a taste for loveliness does not fail to appreciate them.

Through a green lane a few Blackbirds were still busy nesting; this was July 3rd and I found one nest with five eggs, and also a Garden Warbler's containing three eggs, to all appearances forsaken. The Blackcap now and then uttered a few notes, and the little Wren poured out its melodies frequently. The Turtle Doves in the distant woodlands were cooing sweetly and lovingly one to another, and one of the earliest migrants—the Chiff Chaff—was still to be heard. The joyous Willow Wren, too, treated us to a right royal July welcome, as well as the Tree Pipit.

Passing on I suddenly heard a cry, and keeping on the alert I observed a Kestrel high up in the air. For some minutes I stopped and watched its graceful flight. Now almost motionless above the tree tops, then with a swift curve to the right and round again, then once more on poignant wings and

motionless, in which position its well-developed tail was shewn off to perfection. All this time it was uttering a cry, not at all an unpleasant one, and it had apparently a young one somewhere hard by, for the parent bird was in great trouble. Later on, when in the iron horse coming homewards, I saw two more of these birds. Hertfordshire's list of Aves is an excellent one.

Passing along through wooded coppices and gorgeous hedgerows—well garnished with many wild flowers—one inhales the



A LATE NEST AND EGGS OF WHEATEAR.

delicious aroma of the clinging Honeysuckle. Moreover, along a green drive—one side of which the sun catches more than the other—I found a beautiful Wild Strawberry-bed in Nature's own garden. Here, nestling in the soft green foliage, were rich red berries as luscious and delicious in their taste as those grown in the garden. There they were in abundance, I never saw such a sight before. It may be that their abundance was owing in a measure to the track I traversed being private, but no matter.



A PAIR OF KESTRELS, NEST AND YOUNG.

The new mown hay and the well-shaped hay-cocks contrasted pleasingly with the scenery all around. The view to the distant hill-tops held me entranced. The home of the present Prime Minister of England gently nestled in a clump of glorious green trees, and the village church pointed its tapered spire towards the azure sky.

Not far from here I came across a cottager's garden—an earthly paradise—a veritable picture show. To the left was a patch of double Poppies, gorgeous red; Canterbury Bells, mauve and white; sweet scented Pinks, Roses of various hues, and an arbour of Honeysuckle over the doorway; a few bundles of faggots leaning against the moss grown wall; and a thatched roof. What more could one wish for? I thought I heard the Cuckoo, but am not certain; nevertheless I heard and saw it the day previous—the 2nd July. There is nothing very extraordinary in seeing it, but it was very late indeed to hear it. An old Naturalist told me he had never heard it after the 20th June.

On again down fine avenues of Firs, Elms, Beeches, Chestnuts, and Oaks, we cross the main road into the park of one of our great landowners. So soon as I arrived inside the park the coops of young Pheasants attracted my attention. Two thousand were being brought off I was told. I am not so sure—from a Naturalist's point of view—that the Game Laws do more harm than good to wild birds, at any rate the balance may be on the right side. This, however, is not an opportune time to discuss such a question as this.

A stray Pigeon or two were seen winging their way through the trees, whilst on through the gentle sloping pasture lands I reached the river in the hollow. Here I found Wild Fowl in abundance, but owing to the stringent restrictions of his Lordship I was unable to ramble by the river side to notice the varieties to be met with. All I could discern in the distance was at least a hundred young Wild Ducks lazily paddling up the stream, and two or three Mute Swans. I mounted the old stone bridge and here saw such a sight as I have never before witnessed. Pieces of bread were being thrown into the water, and the fish devoured them ravenously. Tremendous fish, too, they were; no matter what part of the river bread was thrown in, there were fish ready to devour it greedily and fight for dear



YOUNG WILD DUCKS.

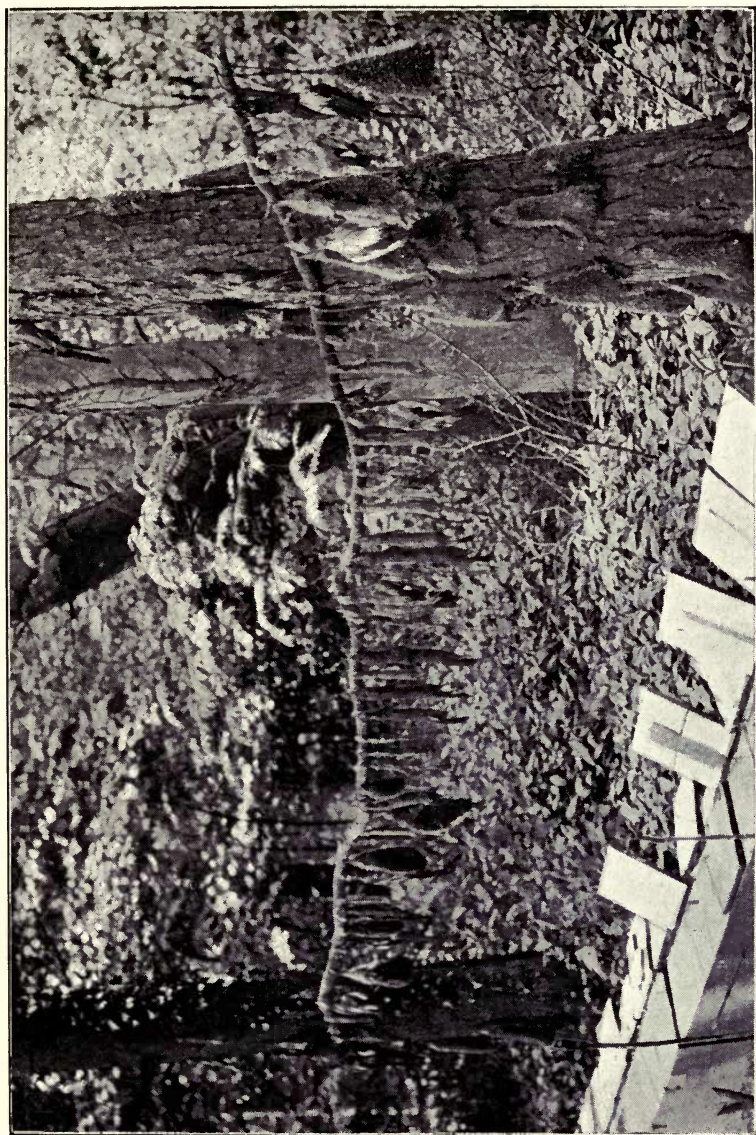
life until they got it. I could perceive Rudd, Roach, Perch, and Carp, their golden and red sides dazzling in the sunlit beam which was thrown right across the stream. The river has not been fished for years; how I longed for my rod and line, a nice red worm, and a permit for a few hours; but his Lordship does not even fish himself, preferring to stroll down by the mossy banks and giving the finny tribe a piece of sponge cake, so the gossips say! Two hundred Pike were taken out not long ago. Small wonder is it, therefore, that the fish mentioned are so plentiful when these "gentlemen" are put out of the way.

It was a glorious view from the bridge. The red brick house is in an excellent position, and makes one feel somewhat despondent that one man should have such belongings, whilst the poor and downtrodden toil from week end to week end for a mere crust of bread.

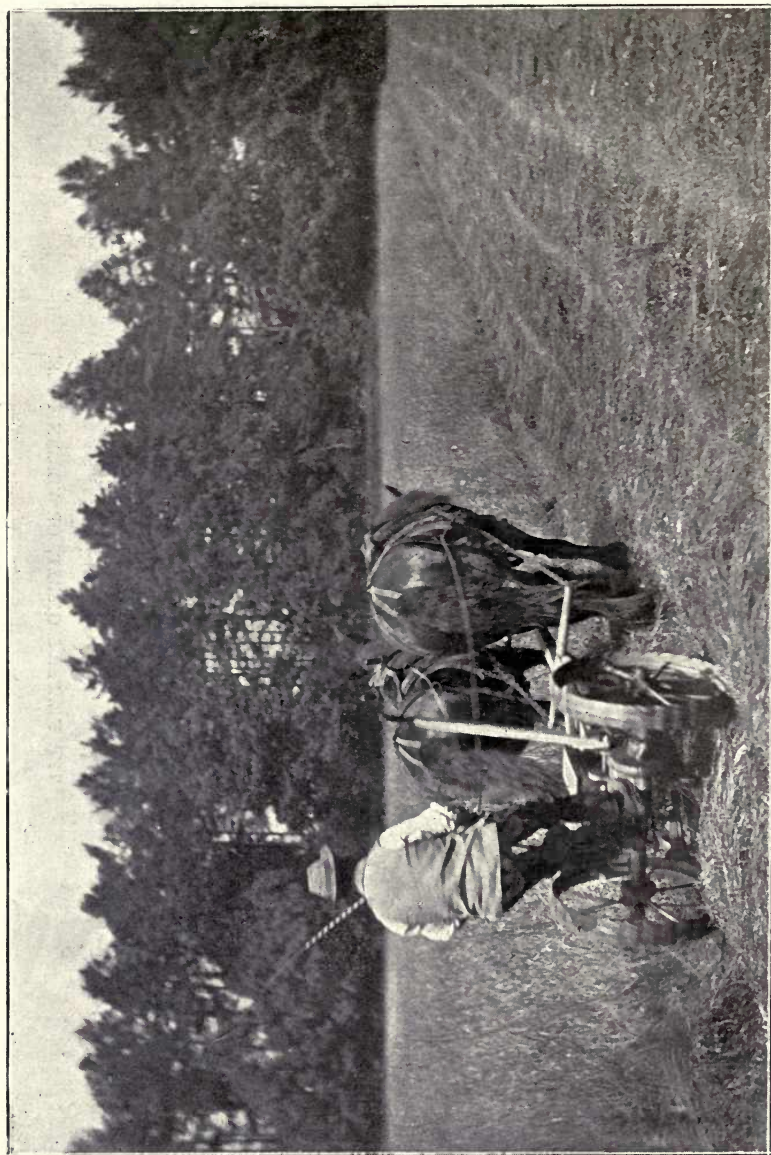
Over the bridge and we again see that "Sport" is being catered for. Here and there a veritable sea of Bracken is seen, now in its green foliage. I should say there were acres of it, and in it and underneath the Rabbits disport themselves to their heart's content until the "fatal day" arrives. The uncurled ends of the ferns presented a curious and pleasing sight, and the level at which the whole grows is wondrous indeed. On the left, in the bracken and underneath the shelter of the trees, some Woodcocks are always shot in the season, but they have never been found nesting here.

From a hawthorn bush I noticed a gaily-plumed bird alight on to the top of the bracken, and I watched it carefully. My friend was of the opinion it was a gorgeous Bullfinch, but the black of the throat and the little patch of white near the head—to be seen on closer examination—proved it to be a Stonechat. One cannot see this bird on every ramble, it is purely local in its distribution.

A refreshing cup of tea at mine host's at the "Wagoners" on the Great North road, and we proceed through the middle of a 500 acre wood. A heap of Jays slaughtered by the side of the green drive made me shudder for a moment and wish for a conversation with the keeper who shot them. The picture Mr. Newman has given us shows a well stocked keeper's gibbet, or vermin pole. I could wish for a quarter of an hour



THE KEEPER'S GIBBET, OR VERMIN POLE.



THE MOWING MACHINE.



YOUNG LONG EARED OWLS IN THE DOWN.

with the owner of the gibbet which is illustrated. It clearly proves the extent to which so-called vermin is persecuted. Keepers will not look at both sides of the question and sum up the balance, which is generally on the right side.

A few Rabbits run out here and there, and a Jay utters its shrieking alarm note, whilst a female Pheasant got up abruptly.

Onwards we proceed, until on the outskirts of the wood the river meets our eye. Skimming over its surface the Swallow and the Martin were to be seen, and three or four Sand Martins—the smallest of the Swallow tribe—did not escape my attention. Several fine Trout were to be observed in the stream, and I understand that for two miles hereabouts there are as many of these fish as anywhere else in England.

Swifts wheel round in a circle and sing the while—it is not at all an unpleasant note—a Thrush makes the woods re-echo with its sweet music, and the Wren again takes up his wonted station and sings with increased vivacity and power. The Corn is a delicious green and well up: let us look forward in joy and hope for a good harvest.

As we wend our way through fields of Corn and Clover, the Rooks fly homewards; the village church bells commence to toll for evensong; the Bat is thinking of commencing its night prowls, and the Owls are well aware of the fact that their day is fast approaching. Talking of Owls reminds me that during the ramble I was shown three young Long-Eared Owls. Their great yellow and black eyes were very prominent, and although it was still light they could see plainly enough. As good luck would have it a mouse was in the trap, and after killing it one of the birds made short work of it, bolting the lot wholesale. He ejected the well known pellet to make room for the mouse, and the evident satisfaction after the tasty rodent had departed was indeed a striking picture. The Owls are much wiser than most people imagine; at any rate they look after their voracious appetites pretty frequently, which is wisdom.

AUGUST.



THE HARVEST FIELD.

NATURE IN AUGUST.

I.

I do not altogether like an early harvest, for the reason that the fields are laid bare all too soon, the rambler loses much of the charm of the country, and has perforce to lose sight of the waving fields of corn; but what of the Sparrows? They have to pay their Autumn visits much earlier, and are out and about in the corn-fields in July, in spite of the lines—

‘When August hangs the bough with plums,
The dusty city Sparrow comes
For sojourn in the country sweet,
To taste the barley and the wheat.

His cynic wit, his mocking eye,
The innocent country ways decry;
Though dews may wash his feathers clean,
He hath the urchin’s heart within.’

For some days now I have rambled morning and eve through the shocks of corn, and noticed the Avian Rat—as the venerable Mr. Tegetmeier has named the House Sparrow—only picks up the fallen grains, and does not rob the farmer of any grain which can be called robbery or pilfering.

How different the scene now to what it was a few weeks since! The waving, rich brown Corn, and nodding Scarlet Poppies, have mostly given place to the stubble, though on

the outskirts of the field various pleasant smelling Thistles and many beautiful Grasses still flourish. It is August, and Summer is on the wane—the nights are fast lengthening—but there are many varieties of flowers blooming.

The Sweet Peas in the gardens make a brave picture show, together with the Nasturtiums, Sunflowers, Asters, Stocks, and Carnations. How sweet the aroma from the two last-named! The Lime trees, too, smell deliciously; and others that may be looked for during the eighth month are the Black Elder, Wild Thyme, Red Crane's Bill, Sow Thistle, the golden stars of the Fleabane, Hop Trefoil, Corn Mint, Red Berried Bryony, Wood Loosestrife, and Saw Wort. How soon in many instances has blossom turned to berries.

The Harvest Mouse—the best account of which has been given by Gilbert White of Selborne, perhaps—interests us, and we may well spend a few moments watching the curious Earwigs in their never-ceasing labour. How destructive these insects are to the Dahlias in the garden! That is why we observe those flower-pots on sticks as we cross the stile by the cottager's little plot. How blue the smoke from the homestead as it towers towards the sky! But what of the birds? Bird life is very quiet, indeed, and all Nature is hushed. Only two birds are singing on our ramble, these are the Greenfinch and Wren, though occasionally a Lark bursts into an anthem of praise, a solitary Redbreast may pipe a few strains, and a startled Jay utter its alarm cry, but even the Rooks are taking a rest from exercising their vocal organs.

We watch a pair of Kestrels and three young ones. Suddenly one of the youngsters darts down by the side of a haystack in the distance. We make our way thither and discover the rascal was attracted by a couple of young Partridges, with the mother bird. He did not touch them, however, and by this time will have been taught that rats and mice are more to his liking than young game. This beautiful Hawk rarely does any harm to Game, and keepers should encourage and protect it.

How late the Swifts were with us in 1899! I saw them on their last night-fly on August 17th. How the Naturalist looks for these sights and listens for these sounds when he is educated sufficiently to know when and where to look and listen for

them. On our ramble we had the satisfaction of seeing one of the balance-keepers of Nature at his work. Right in the garden path—skirted on one side by a fine row of scarlet runner Beans, and on the other by neatly hoed rows of magnum bonum Potatoes—a Sparrow Hawk dashed down and killed a Sparrow. How precise he was and how quick! Through the woods, too, we now and then came across a few feathers. The moral is obvious.

Early in the month the Nightjar was still to be heard, but



SJETLAND SHEEP IN AN ENGLISH PARK.

what of the Grasshoppers? On an acre or two of grass land we came across thousands of these agile and noisy creatures. We caught at least six varieties and examined them under a glass. How delicate the greens and yellows, and how curious the staring eyes! Almost every minute a brightly plumed Redstart darts from a post into the grass and picks up some insect. Is it Grasshoppers he is after? Pheasants and Partridges are being reared hereabouts. What a business it is, and although

many regard this hand-rearing as a tame affair, a keeper of much experience tells me that birds are getting wilder than ever and more difficult to shoot. One of the Pheasants has got entangled in the wire netting, let us liberate it.

We halt at the keeper's cottage. He is rearing 500 chickens, and thinks nothing of it. What a grand run they have in the surrounding fields, and how strong and well they look. Three or four beautiful smooth and curly coated Black Retrievers make great friends with us, but we are not particularly anxious to make friends with sixteen Ferrets—all wallowing in amongst a dead chicken and rabbit—but what interesting animals they are! Talking of them reminds me that there are a good many Badgers in this beautiful Home County through which we are traversing, and Stoats are by no means uncommon. We must, of course, look at the well-fed and groomed Nag in the stable, and the Fowls sitting in a dozen nest boxes. How contented they seem, how intent upon the task allotted to them, and how cross they look at being disturbed!

Through the wood we meet, on turning the corner, the woodmen at their work. Piles of bark, faggots, and huge branches are stacked up, and oak posts and pailings are being sawn off. Four posts and a piece of tarpaulin flung over the top serves as a mess-house for them, and they invite us inside. A happier and more contented set of men never existed than the woodmen, with their pipe and gallon jar they are never ill at ease. In the park we have the good fortune to observe some Shetland Sheep, and these we have illustrated on the previous page.

The Spotted Flycatcher is still with us, and we stop to watch its quick and studied movements, whilst Ring Doves flutter out of the tree tops at almost every step. They are still breeding.

We are by the water again now. Here it is just like Spring—so fresh and green—far different to the sun-scorched paths and stubbles we traversed earlier in the day. By the old stone bridge a Wagtail's nest is shewn to us in which a young Cuckoo was reared, and from here up the hillside we have a fine view of the Beech trees, under which two or three hundred Deer are resting.

The keeper tells us he has never yet found a Jackdaw's

nest where Deer are about, that did not contain flick from the beast, and this is obtained by the bird perching on the animal's back. Through the park—noticing a Woodpecker or two on the way—we come to grass land again. A further small flock of Sheep are here, and on one of their backs we observe two or three Starlings after the ticks.

How wonderful is Nature, and how beautiful a lesson may be learned from the last incident which we have recorded!

NATURE IN AUGUST.

II.

Alas, the Cuckoo has departed some little time and most birds are now silent. Parental cares and trials are over, and the young broods can be seen in the fields and lanes, accompanied in many instances by the parent birds.

The only birds which appear to feel a pleasure in uttering a few notes at this time are the Tits, but it is a constrained sort of utterance, and most birds are mute, save perhaps a Lark now and then, or a few chirping Sparrows. The important work is over, and the feathered tribe are taking a well-earned rest, and unless particularly observant it is somewhat difficult for one to see any signs of bird life at this season. All Nature is hushed, not a leaf moves, and only the spanking of threshing machines and the clanking of the reaper's sickle is to be heard. August appears to be the climax of the seasons—it is a kind of go-between—but it is a month which forcibly reminds us of the wonderful effected workings, and works, of Nature.

In a past essay I observed that the Corn was well up, and that we might look forward with joy and hope for the harvest. Now the harvest itself is passed, and we begin to look forward to yet another season, and another harvest. The landscape has changed considerably; where some few weeks ago was a glorious patch of green, is now a sun-dried patch of light straw-coloured brown, and so on, but the foliage on the trees has yet to age before assuming the golden and russet brown garb of Autumn. Sometimes this is very prolonged, and at others, it seems to be somewhat premature.

Did the reader ever notice the loveliness of the common wild flowers to be met with at this season? They are to be found in abundance, and a nosegay of many colours may soon be gathered. The drooping Hare-bells by the scorched road-side

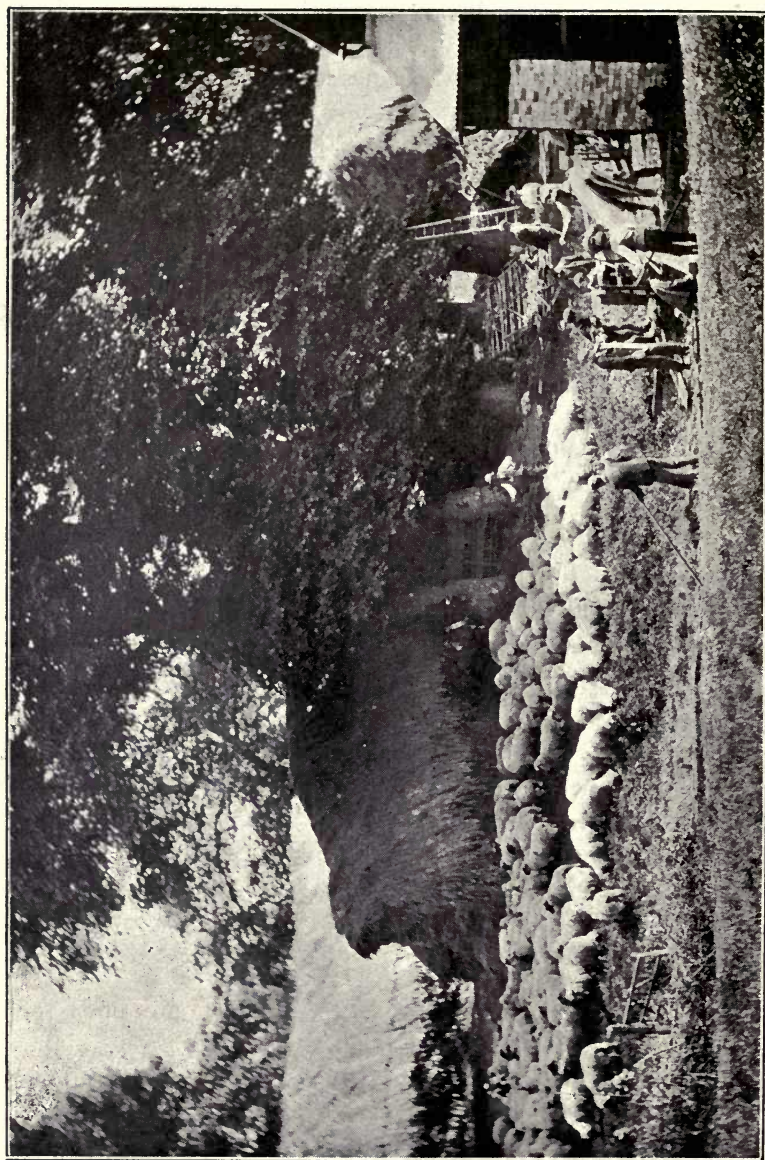
are exquisite in their tenderness and delicacy; the golden Bird's Foot Trefoil on the heaths and commons mingles pleasantly with the scarlet Cuckoo flowers and a stray Poppy, another fragile beauty. Grasses are abundant, too, the prettiest being perhaps the Quaker Grass, which nestles beautifully in amongst Daisies and Wild Thyme.

Along the hedgerows the white and pink Blackberry blossoms are seen, and the Nut-stems are laden with Nuts, now quickly ripening under the bronzing rays of the brilliant sunshine.

A Greater Whitethroat darts out from the hedgerow, and curiosity leads one to search for a may-be nest, but it has long since been dispensed with, and the young Warblers are rapidly gaining the strength which is necessary for them to undertake the journey to Southern Africa. Forget-me-nots peep out here and there, and bordering all along a corn-field, Wild Dragons shew up their golden and red petals most conspicuously, which is enhanced by the Traveller's Joy running over the top of the hedgerow.

The hedges are strewn with straw, probably brushed off from the carts carrying the sheaves to the harvest home. The delicate little Herb Robert still blooms; Pig-nuts are of the same high colour, but much larger, and considerably more showy, and the green bunches of keys on the Hornbeam cannot fail to call forth our wonder and admiration. A nest of the Bullfinch—rather late it is true—attracts our notice on the side of an Elm tree—placed in a well-developed fork—and a dead Blackbird tells the tale I suppose that the farmer hard by has put it to death because of the depredations carried on in his orchard among the luscious cherries. He probably did not look at the other side of the picture—the good side—but shot it there and then. It was stealing a few cherries, and it had to pay the penalty.

The mention of this reminds me that birds are often responsible for planting fruit and other trees in most out of the way and unlooked for places. People who have seen Raspberry-caness growing in the middle of a wood have wondered how they have got there, and the same with regard to Cherries, Apples, Currants, and so on. The explanation probably is that the seeds passing uninjured through the alimentary canal



THE WASH-BROOK.

results in the propagation of the trees enumerated. By the side of the well-wooded coppice, in the rich brown soil, Foxgloves abound; Cow Parsnip is still as white as fragrant flakes of snow, and the mauve-coloured and blue Corn Flowers contrast pleasingly with the various lovely green and yellow tints of the young Oak saplings.

We stop and watch the busy scene that is taking place at the Washbrook and congratulate the patient Sheep on the manner in which they go through the washing process.

The new mown hay in the well shaped hay-cocks smells delicious, and around the farmyard pool a few Swallows and Swifts still disport themselves. On a sort of waste common are Thistles and other weeds in abundance. Here we find the Goldfinch, if anywhere, and on the occasion of our visit we flushed a beautifully marked Ring Dove, a Greenfinch, and a few Linnets.

Scentless Mayweed was here found, and the green foliage had a special charm for me. I had never noticed it to such perfection before. Underneath a Cherry tree, close to the farmyard—where the proud Chanticleer could be seen—a young Ass was enjoying himself, the smallest I ever saw. It was no higher than a Collie Dog, and not much larger in proportion. Simple and gentle is the English Ass, but treated in a very inhuman manner by some people when requisitioned as a beast of burden. Always be kind to dumb animals. If they do not possess the speech wherewith to thank you, they *are* thankful for it, and there is a great deal in protecting anything which cannot protect itself.

A few Partridge feathers by the wayside tells us that the parents have been out with their young ones—perhaps we may light upon a small covey of them, and then helter-skelter is it for a few moments until they safely hide themselves in the herbage. The sun is still broiling hot and the oppressive heat unbearable; even the Rooks appear to have a lazy fit on; we betake ourselves to a neighbouring inn to refresh the inner man, and stay there rather longer than we intended, surveying a very handsome case of Barn Owls, and endeavouring to convince the landlord of how they would have helped him to keep in check “the tasty rodents.”

WILD LIFE AT HOME, AND ABROAD.

A COMPARISON, AND A CHOICE.

I love my Country, and I must admit I prefer to remain purely a home bird. When I have traversed every nook and corner in England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales in search of the Wild Life with which our own and the sister Island teems, then perhaps I may look forward to quitting our own shores for fields anew. But in this brief life of three score years and ten I am afraid if I carefully and accurately naturalize in Great Britain alone I shall at the end of my tether have not even finished my own Country, to say nothing of visiting elsewhere.

Dear Britain, how I glory in being born and bred in such a free and delightful land, where there is such abundance of Wild Life to interest, elevate, and amuse. As a homester, I do not wonder at the foreigner being captivated with the rural charms of Britain, her woods and vales, her moors and fens, her heaths and dells, her meadows and quiet shady nooks, her Killarneys and Windermeres, her soft crystal streams, her noble parks, her mountains, and the peaceful scene which is presented as one travels in the country from North to South, and from East to West. And the Wild Life which exists is not only astonishing to our foreign visitor, but also to those of us who make it a life study. The more we look into the Nature around us—from January right away to December—deeper do we have to study, closer must we observe, wider the field opens, until finally we find our task incomplete, our life's journey too short to finish what we had commenced, and we quit this mortal coil for the unknown worlds, leaving our study almost at starting point. Volumes have been written about the Wild Life of Britain, its birds have had more books published about them than any others in the whole world, but volumes still remain, and will in the future doubtless be forthcoming.

To Gilbert White—that dear old Selborne patriarch—belongs the credit in my opinion for the opening out of the interest which is now evinced in our Fauna, or, to advance a step farther, in the delights of country life, and country pursuits and studies. Since the Selborne Naturalist's time interest in the Wild Life of our Country has increased by leaps and bounds, not altogether to the advantage of certain rare birds and animals which have now entirely disappeared from our midst it is true, but this does not come within our province to enlarge upon, or even dilate upon in any measure.

Now let us see in as brief a manner as possible what Wild Life there is in other Countries, and then finally set out in a short and concise form the sights and sounds on every hand, at every turn, in our own beloved Britain. I am writing down my thoughts just as they occur to me, and shall pay no heed to cut and dried classifications and generalizations, or to geographical distributions.

I would like to go to Holland to meet with the Great Crested Grebe and the Spoonbill; I would enjoy a trip to the Engstlen Alps and be amongst the Alpine birds and flowers—the beautiful Alpine Swift, the Bonelli's Warbler, the Crimson Winged Wall Creeper, the Black Redstart, the Nutcracker and the Great Black Woodpecker only to mention a few birds in passing which abound in yonder Switzerland, the peasant's paradise.

It would interest me to ramble over the well tilled lands of France and watch the Hen Harrier—now almost extinct in Britain—and then we might go on to Norway. There we might wander through those lonely pine forests where the Fieldfares and Redwings present themselves in a far different manner than when they are with us as Winter visitors; then farther North still, up in the Arctic Regions among the Polar Bears, the Ivory Gulls, the Seals, the Little Auks, the Laplanders and their Reindeer.

Let us now come very much farther South—it is as well to have these extremes and opposites—and proceed to India. How grand to watch the Tiger, the Lion, the Leopard, the Wild Boar, the Zebu, the Peacock—that symbol of vanity—the Cheetah, the Parrots, the Crows, the Jungle Fowl, the giant Snakes, the Elephant, the Weaver Birds, the Bulbuls, the Pheasants, the Cranes, the

Bustards, and the Pigeons: then on to Africa to watch the curious Secretary Bird, the Giraffes, the Ostriches, the Zebras, the Porcupines, the Sacred Ibis and Kingfisher, the Rhinoceroses, the Antelopes, the Monkeys, the Leopards, the Crocodiles, the Hyenas, the Oryx, the Hippopotamus, the Hornbills and the Painted Bunting; the Spring Boks, Purple and Green Turacos, the Sun Birds—which rival the brilliant hues of the Humming Birds—the Baboons, the African Chamois, the Cobras, the Locusts, the Alligators, the Pelicans, and those marvellous insects, and various other crawling, creeping, and flying creatures with which that vast Continent teems. How glorious to ramble midst the Plumbago and the wild Gardenias! To Africa I might go, not as a Big Game Hunter and Shooter, but armed with powerful field glasses, a note book, and good wholesome provisions in the kit bag. I would go to *see*, not to *shoot*.

Let us leave that vast tract of Country and go to our loyal and brave Australia to study the Kangaroos and other animals; the Bower Birds, the Turtles, the Parrots, the Cassowary, the Laughing Jackass, the Goura Pigeons, the Cockatoos, the Whistling Thrush, the Lyre Birds—those marvels of feathered creatures—and on to New Zealand and observe the curious Kiwi, the Notornis, the Owl-Parrots, the Black Swans, and the other Fauna of that fascinating Country.

Follow me to North America; how great a treat to watch the Wild Turkeys, the Dusky Grouse, the Prairie Hen, the Turkey-Vulture, the Marsh Hawk, the Screech Owl and exquisite Snowy variety too; the Beavers, the Bison—not the Buffalo—and the Musk Ox. Then on to South America; to be among those marvellous Parrots, Horned Screamers, Toucans, Flamingos, Pumas, Rheas, Ant Eaters, Jaguars, those delicately Nature-painted Orchids, those Heaven-born Birds of Paradise, those myriads of insects and animals, trees and flowers. We must not forget, too, the 400 species of Humming Birds known to exist on the American Continent alone!

We might go to the Olive Groves of Italy and to fair and sunny Spain; we might go farther afield and watch the birds and monkeys at Ceylon, and be amazed at the immensity of the various plantations which there flourish and abound. What of

Central Asia, among the herds of Wild Horses, Wild Donkeys, Wild Camels, and Wild Sheep?

The Flowers of the Holy Land, and the Cedars of Lebanon, would doubtless call forth our admiration, and we might flit right away to patriotic Canada—to Sleighland and Snowland. The Pariah Dogs of the East and the Java Peacock would no doubt attract us, or to suddenly see coming over the horizon on the vast Desert the caravan, with its following of Vultures and other preying birds.

We might visit the East and the West Indies, China and Japan, and zealously pursue our studies of the Fauna there found; or, coming somewhat nearer home again, we might go to Germany, and observe the various wild life, and rural delights, of that mighty Empire.

What of great Russia, and her hungry, prowling Wolves and Brown Bears? Alas, how feeble a treatment of such a vast Country, and yet we must press on.

What an enthralling sight to stand and gaze upon those millions of Penguins and other Sea birds at the Falkland Islands, to literally wade through them, so travellers tell me, and onwards I might proceed. I might write volumes on the subject under consideration, and then only have brushed the fringe of it aside. We have now only touched slightly upon the great Continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia, and such other Countries as occur to me as I write, before coming to Britain, but, after all, this is only just a glimpse of one corner of this great Nature picture, and a poor and unpretentious treatment of a subject which has engaged the attention of so many master minds.

On the other side of the canvas we have the dear homeland, the land of the freeborn. Vast and great, captivating, fascinating, and awe-striking it may be to visit other lands—some of which I have so feebly touched upon—but give me Great Britain with its Daisy and Buttercup-spangled meadows, and green-swarded pasture lands; its tiny rivulets and sluggish streams; its lakes and meres—where the Kingfishers and the Wagtails supply studies which might engage a lifetime, and where the Little Grebes *dob* to their heart's content. Take me to a green lane, or a secluded wood in Hertfordshire;

or to see the milk-white bloom of a Surrey hedgerow; leave me to watch the gambols of the Squirrel, the run of the Hare, the dibbing Rooks in the ploughed lands, the soaring Lark, the clamorous Jackdaws; the amorous Doves, the useful Mole; let me see the Blind Worm, the Earth Worm, the Butterflies—that Peacock Beauty and that delicate Brimstone—leave me to study those wonderful Caterpillars—those of the Privet Hawk and Humming Bird Hawk Moths—and I will be satisfied.

Take me and drop me gently down near Beachy Head to watch those Peregrine Falcons, Gulls, Guillemots, and Divers; let me stroll by the golden-pebbled sea-shore somewhere, and look for those freckled eggs of the Terns, and watch the graceful creatures in their sweet flight; may I stop and examine the Crustacea which abounds, the Marine Insect and Animal life which is to be found on every side? Send me off to the Shetland Islands, among the Puffins, the Skuas, and other Sea Fowl, how rough and rugged, how immense the scene which is here presented!

May I come somewhat South from the Shetlands, and visit bonnie Scotland, where I can see the Golden and White Tailed Eagles in their eyries, the Grouse on the heather-clad moors. What more does one want than to ramble in the neighbourhood of the glorious Dee, Don, and Spey, the noble Forth and Tay? Let me bring within range of my glasses that fine old Black Cock which Scotland can proudly boast of, and the grand Capercaillie! Without our Scotia we should be badly off, our Avi-Fauna at any rate would suffer terribly; it is the haven of refuge for many a British species, so all hail to the land of the thistle, the land of majestic mountains, fine cities, and loyal peoples.

Then may I visit the Dipper—a water bird that sings and a song bird that dives, and, therefore, a puzzle to Darwinians—in its Derbyshire haunts, and come down South to Norfolk's broads and reed beds, or the Lincolnshire fens? Show me the Snipe and the Duck tribe, let me glide along by the reeds in an old but water-proof punt, and see if I can meet with the Reed and Marsh Warblers, and catch a glimpse of a Bearded Titmouse, or even a common Water Vole!

Now let me go to a Heronry or a Rookery; bring to me a

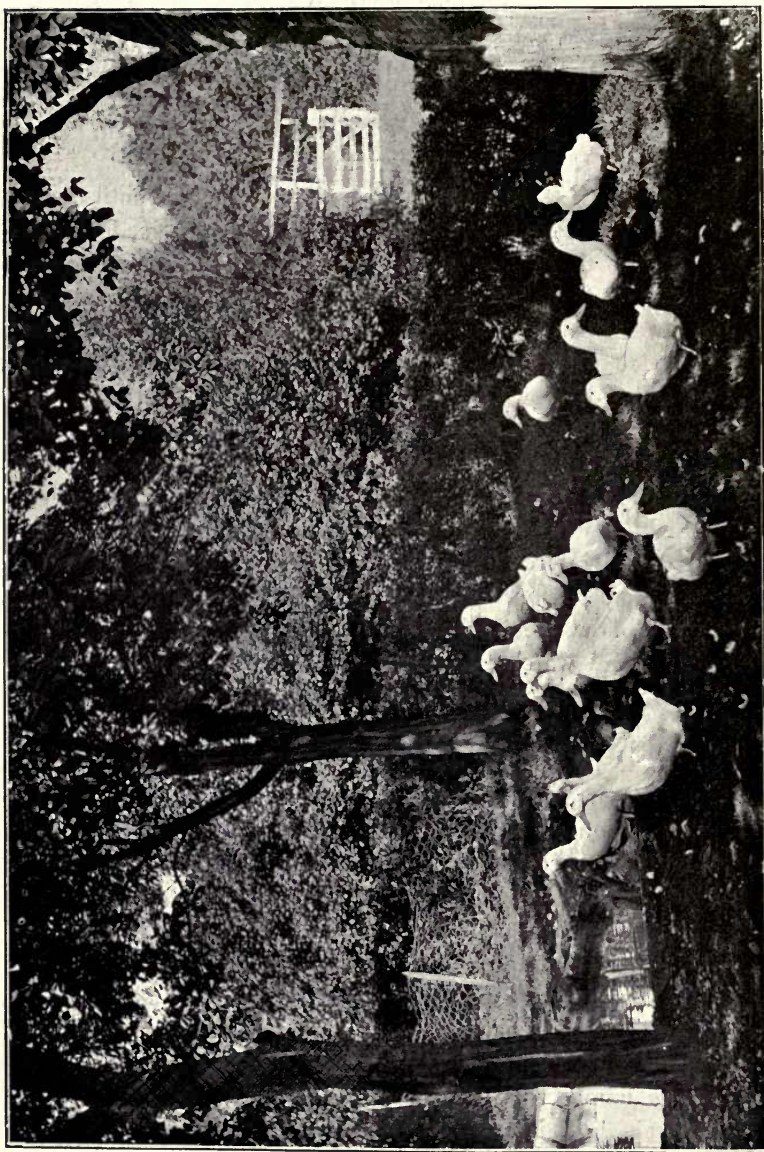
water Forget-me-not, or other water flowers, plants, and insects; let me see the striped Perch at home, and the silver dappled Roach and Dace, and the big mouthed Pike, or the wriggling Eel; then take me to see the Cornish Chough, and leave me to sit and watch the ever murmuring waves which play upon the rugged Cornish Coast!

Traversing inland again, let me go to the 'old spot' in early Spring, and watch and listen for the call of "Cuckoo" from that well known belt of woodland; and may I linger until dewy eve for the first heard strains of England's sweet-voiced Nightingale? Stay with me to watch and listen to the ventriloquial Landrail, as he runs through the waving corn; go with me to the pool and see the Swallows and Martins skimming along the surface; notice the Spotted Flycatcher on the pliant branches of the weeping willow; observe the sooty Moorhen and the crooing Coot! May I go to some snug retreat in July, and feast in Nature's own Strawberry garden, and watch, day by day, the changing tints, and then the Autumn dresses, the golden and bronze, the completion of a season of Nature's handiwork.

Cannot I find interest and amusement in watching the snow flakes fall at one season, and the June sunset at another? Cannot I in Winter follow the industrious Titmice in all their clever and useful habits and watch the whistling Nuthatch; at this so-called *barren* season, too, cannot I the better study the network of the trees, and at my very garden door listen to the song of the Redbreast, the cheery matin of a Wren, or the warbling of a Hedge Sparrow?

To Spring again let us betake our thoughts, let us watch daily the shooting corn. Carefully may we observe the unfolding of the delicate green leaves of early Spring, how glad all Nature seems at her new lease of life. Notice the gradual resurrection of insect, and bird, and animal life; then, later in the year, do not let us pass unheeded the massive snow-white Cherry and Fruit Orchards, and, a few months afterwards, let us pluck the luscious fruit, and give the birds their share, for surely every labourer is worthy of his hire.

Think again how interesting it is to watch for the unfolding of the first Snow-drop or Crocus, then go to the harvest field and spend an hour among the reapers and the gleaners!



AYLESBURY DUCKS IN THEIR NATIVE VALE.

As you pass by the village green notice the lads and lasses who are sporting there. Here many a British boy has been raised who in after years has done noble duty for his Country on some far off land or sea. How rural the scene, how truly restful, yet grand!

Let us go to some quiet farmyard, and watch the Poultry; the gay old Chanticleer, the frugal Swine, the broad-limbed Cart Horses, the dappled hides of the Cows, the faithful Sheep Dog, the tumbling Pigeons, the well shaped Hay ricks; and let us chat awhile with the proud owner of this 'Three Acres and a Cow'!

Let us stop the cowman or the shepherd, or perchance the ploughman may cross our path; these are three of Britain's truest sons, and it pays to take time by the forelock, and chat with them as to the progress of the various departments of farming in which they are engaged. If it be April, ask them if they have seen a Swallow yet, or heard the Summer Warblers, and, if they have not, they will willingly direct you to the spot where they are sure to be first seen or heard.

Let us stroll through the standing grass—that is along the winding, well trodden pathway—and notice the hundreds of Grasses with which our land is blessed, and the Oxeye Daisies; nothing could please us more than to listen to the Skylark as we watch it soaring cloudwards, singing perhaps for entrance at the very gates of Heaven; or the mellow notes of a sweet-voiced Thrush. Shew me that cow-dung lined nest, and those shells of unpaintable blue, ink-spotted over; the silver-lichened nest of the Long Tailed Titmouse; the huge nests of the Sea Birds; the Field Mouse with his merry little family; the burrows of the Rabbits; the heaps of the Mole; all, all will interest me, and fresh sights and sounds crop up at every turn.

Let me watch the Weasel or the Fox; may I linger by the time-worn river posts, and observe the Caddis, and examine that marvellous homestead he so dexterously models! Even the Sticklebacks—which the children hasten to eternity by catching and bottling in receptacles where the finnies have no chance to breathe—are worthy of a close attention and study.

The love of Sport is born in these young Britishers, *little Eng-*

landers in stature, but let us hope that they may become, as they grow older, *Little* Englanders no longer.

Let me go to Ireland and see the Red Deer in County Kerry; pitch me down on the banks of the Shannon; let me watch the Otter fishing out the Salmon from the waters of the Anna Liffey; let me wander round the coast amongst the hordes of Sea Birds, dwell amidst the Shamrock, and I will be content. Ireland is a too little explored Country, and its Fauna has I believe much that will interest future Naturalists who care to make their studies in the sister Isle.

Let me go to Westmoreland, amongst those lovely Windermere Lakes, here is loveliness indeed; cannot I pay a visit to the huge colony of Black-Headed Gulls at Drigg Marsh; and may I study elsewhere the Tadpoles and the Frogs; the Water Newts in all their various stages and life habits? Why I might spend a lifetime observing our Wild Fowl—for we still possess, although so much of our land is cultivated, more species of Wild Fowl than any other Country in the world!

What of a peaceful evening in some quiet secluded spot in England during the month of May? To listen to the jarring warble of the Nightjar, the droning of a Moth or Beetle, the tinkling of the Sheep Bells, the bark of a distant Watch Dog, the closing of a lattice gate by some returning lover, the advent of the Stars, the hoot of an Owl, the cock-up of a startled Pheasant; then Philomel captivates us as he starts up that 'Jug, jug, jug,' from out the thick shade of a blossoming thorn!

What more delightful excursion than to gallant little Wales, *little* Country of *big* mountains, deep valleys and ravines; to wander by the Severn, and catch a glimpse from the mountain tops of one of the last pairs of Kites now left to us as British Breeding Birds.

We must not forget to mention Hopland, how grand to take stock of the rich clusters of which Kent County is so justly proud; and, in passing, the Cider Counties of Somerset, Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester must not be overlooked in their sweet rural surroundings, and fruit giving domains. We can only spare a word for beautiful Devonshire—the Fernland of England—and must reluctantly leave to the imagination

the various other scenic spots and wild life which we have in Britain.

How much farther must I proceed to prove what Britain's wild and rural life presents to the observant and the Nature lover?

Must I mention the giant spreading Oaks, the sea of Hyacinths, the Cowslip and Primrose-covered banks, the peaceful agricultural villages, the Clover fields, the glorious views from the old stile on the hillside? Shall we visit the old ruins, or the village church, where the ever-green Ivy loves to entwine itself, and where the Owls and Bats are blinking and snoozing until their night-prowls; and may I pluck the Celandine, and examine its every component part?

The last scene I shall present is the Sheep Fold in early Spring. What a truly captivating scene! Playful Lambs, so innocent, so vivacious, and attractive. The attentive parents, and the Meadow Pipits which love to frequent these surroundings! Behold a Starling takes up his station on the back of one of the Sheep, and commences searching for ticks! Was there ever a more striking and practical example of Animal intelligence, for notice how quiet the animal stands as he is being rid of parasites which tickle and annoy him, and, then, on the other hand, how the Starling knows that the ticks are there, and how pleased the saucy creature seems at having such a good fill from such a fleecy cover!

Longfellow proved his practical acquaintance with Nature when he wrote the lines:—

‘If thou art worn and hard beset
With sorrows that thou wouldst forget,
If thou wouldst read a lesson that will keep
Thy heart from fainting and thy soul from sleep,
Go to the woods and hills!—No tears
Dim the sweet look that Nature wears.’

Much have I left unwritten, but there must be some limit; this is barely an introduction, it scarcely merits the title of a preface, but it is hoped that such a brief, unpretentious, and ill-constructed sketch may at any rate have interested some indifferent observers who are continually complaining that the Country is dull, and life hardly worth living. Then, if my

humble endeavours to roughly sketch an outline of the rest it gives to the mind, and the health imparted to the body, to ramble through the land with which we have been so truly blessed, results in someone becoming interested, or even amused, these lines will not have been written in vain.

Let me stay in Britain; let me study the Wild Life which abounds on every side; every living creature, every flower that blooms, every tree that grows; let me ramble where the Daisies and the Crowfoots flourish, and the Lark soars heavenwards, and the Sparrows chirp one to another.

SEPTEMBER.



LARGE FUNGI.

NATURE IN SEPTEMBER.

ALAS the Summer is on the wane. A courageous Wren or Robin may utter a few notes, but all our Summer visitors will soon be harboured in far distant climes. Still, those who delight in country pursuits and studies can always find something to interest and amuse all the year round, as my various monthly essays shew, and even now we have some few beautiful weeks left before the fading light of Autumn has entirely flickered out.

One reason I like September is because my Robin has returned to the garden and enlivens the place from early morn to dewy eve with its sweet music. I suppose he raises his brood in some grassy bank not far distant, and now that family cares are over he has joined me again for a few months stay.

This year he reappeared for the first time towards the end of August, and he never looked better or brighter in plumage. Perched on my garden fence only yesterday he was a picture in his breast of red, and ashy and brown plumage. I sat for an hour watching, whistling, and talking to him, and he answered my caresses in such sweet strains that I feel more endeared than ever to the dapper little fellow. He has four sets of music at this season; one is a hissing note, another like the slow unwinding of a fisherman's winch, the third is the ordinary song—somewhat melancholy but beautifully mellow and musical—and lastly he utters an extremely faint but pleasing warble which might easily deceive the well trained ear of the Naturalist if the bird was not seen.

Talking of sights and sounds in my garden reminds me that the Sparrows have been catching the Green Cabbage Caterpillars by the dozen. It has amused and interested me to see them hawking over the tops of the cabbages, then darting in under the leaves and coming out with a giant devastator in the beak. The impudent rascal chirps as he alights

on the gravel path, the caterpillar being in its beak the while, for be it known that birds can sing even if they are carrying anything in their beaks. How anyone who studies the life and habits of these 'Common' Sparrows can have the heart to condemn them neck and crop will with me ever remain a mystery.

The mention of Caterpillars reminds me that I have spent some pleasant hours watching the habits of a beautiful variety



THE WOODMEN AT WORK.

I found on my Privet hedge, about which I must defer particulars until next month.

After the refreshing and long hoped for rains, how lovely the country looks again. Nature all round appears at a glance to shake herself up to new life and vigour, but those falling leaves tell tales and by next month it will nearly all be over.

There are still a quantity of wild flowers blooming. On a two hours ramble recently I obtained fifty three varieties, this early in the month. Amongst them may be enumerated the

following:—Field Convolvulus, Silver Weed, Scarlet Poppy, Dandelion, Bulbous Crowfoot, Red Dead Nettle, Harebell, Bush Vetch, Bramble, Small Knapweed, Spear Plume Thistle, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Bladder Campion, Red Meadow Clover, Garlic Mustard, Carrot, Corn Mint, Groundsel, Dwarf Thistle, Hemp Nettle, Red Berried Bryony, Goose Grass, Broad Leaved Plantain, Forget-me-not, Scarlet Pimpernel, Nipplewort, Field Scabious, Knot Grass, Self Heal, Corn Crowfoot, Autumnal Hawkbit, Common Mallow, Scentless Mayweed, Sow Thistle, Herb Robert and Woody Nightshade. There is a formidable list indeed, and I have left a dozen or more unmentioned. All these wild flowers I found blooming within a mile and a half of a Midland City of 20,000 inhabitants. It is an interesting and fascinating study, and one I would advise all those desirous of following a bloodless and profitable pursuit and hobby to take up, together with the birds of the air, and the other branches of Natural History. Keeping the mind occupied cannot be too often stated as a means of safeguarding the young against all dangers.

On the morning of our ramble a pair of Spotted Flycatchers again afforded us intense amusement and interest as they have so often done before, and as we sit watching them—clusters of nuts now quickly ripening, hanging on the pliant branches overhead—a Green Woodpecker flies quickly across the field skirting the wood and then alights and laughs at the fun he is having. A Blackbird still utters its alarm note, and the Titmice have again found their vocal organs after a temporary cessation during the breeding season. One very late nest of young ones we observe in the hole of a hollow tree. What fluffy little balls they are!

A pair of Ring Doves are still found nesting—if they do not make haste those youngsters will not be in fit condition for some cockney sportsman to blaze away at on his Christmas holidays. After the Thistle, Charlock, Plantain, Dock and other obnoxious weed seeds on a piece of waste ground, I have lately noticed Goldfinches, Linnets, Lesser Redpolls, Greenfinches, Chaffinches, Wood Pigeons, and Larks, the first three in very small numbers as compared with the others.

I have missed those delightful last night-flies of the busy careering Swifts, they have gone off to Africa now; I saw them

last on the 28th of August. Passing along we notice some nice coveys of Partridges which have so far escaped the gun and were not put up on the long looked for 'First.' A Rabbit scampers along the hedge by the roadside and a working man's lurcher—or poacher perhaps is a better name for the animal—is



A PAIR OF CROSSBILLS.

after it. Bunny is much too quick for the ill-trained dog, and escapes into the cover, much to the disgust of the dog's owner, who signifies his anger at losing a good and cheap dinner by kicking the poor brute. Inhuman man!

Along the pailings of the grand old wooded park we observe three Cock Robins perched all within a space of a dozen yards. Is not this strange for the Robin?

Has the reader ever noticed that very few birds now are killed by coming in contact with telegraph wires compared with the number which suffered death when these all important poles and wires were first erected? It is a fact worth noticing because of the way in which the feathered creatures have apparently educated themselves. On only one ramble of late years have I been a witness of a catastrophe, and that happened to a pair of Fieldfares some five years ago.

The Yellow Bunting still sings 'A little bit of bread and no cheese' from out of the topmost branches of a fine Chestnut, and in a garden we notice a pair of Marsh Tits, far away from marshes and water of any kind. What a curious note they have too. How it is brought home to us as we watch these industrious little creatures that birds can very well live without man but man cannot live without birds.

Along a hedgerow bordering a fine field of turnips we turn a nest full of young Whitethroats out, scampering into the undergrowth for their very lives. Notice the parent birds in the topmost branches watching our every movement, and then when danger is passed joining their brood and sheltering them. What an illustration of parental affection!

Passing by the river we stop for a few moments to watch a pair of brightly plumed Kingfishers on their beat, and some industrious working men catching Craw Fish, which, when boiled, look and taste similar to Lobster, but are much smaller.

The Swallows and Martins still warble sweet and low, the Humble Bees and the Humming Bird Hawk Moths are studies in themselves. The golden *Eschscholtzia* in the gardens—with the exquisite light green foliage—still opens its beautiful petals to the September sunshine, and the Dahlias are in their prime, but how the nights lengthen! The Bat prowls round my house now as early as 7 o'clock and at that hour it is with difficulty that I can watch its quick and agile movements. What a strange and weird creature this.

The wind blows about the silken tassels of the Thistle and propagates that obnoxious weed in all manner of situations, but in the sunshine they look like frail silver butterflies toying in the air. Nature is becoming more silent day by day—all the Warblers are preparing for their over-sea journeys, and it

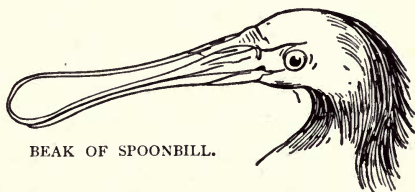
may be interesting to give in conclusion the regular flight lines. They cross the Mediterranean Sea by one of four established routes:—

1. Across the Straits of Gibraltar.
2. From the Coast of the Gulf of Genoa, through Corsica and Sardinia, to Tunis.
3. From Italy, via Sicily and Malta, to Tripoli.
4. From Asia Minor, by Cyprus, to Egypt.

A STUDY IN BIRDS' BEAKS.

THERE are a great many people nowadays who take notice of a brightly plumed bird—which for the moment calls forth their admiration—but how many are there who know the diversity which exists in birds' beaks, other than the cultivated Ornithologist? Moreover, there are a great many of the latter who have not studied the beaks of birds to any extent, and by not doing so it is certainly a positive loss to them, for the reason that a bird's beak is often the one and only distinguishing mark from that of another variety. That is to say, there are some birds which are almost similar in plumage, and their only characteristic difference is in the beak.

I have picked out at random the beaks of some twenty-six birds for the purpose of this article, and these will be sufficient to show the variations which exist in regard to their construction. Birds' beaks present an almost endless variety of form, which is associated with an equally diversified use. It is interesting to note in passing that there



BEAK OF SPOONBILL.



BEAK OF EGYPTIAN VULTURE.

is no bird at present existing which lacks a beak, but in some species, long since extinct, the beak was absent. In this case, teeth took the place of the beak, which is well described in an article on the anatomy of birds in Hudson's "British Birds" as simply a horny tract of skin, which has become hardened by its special uses.

It is one of the most wonderful examples of Nature's workings, this adaptation of so many various builds of beaks, the

more so because those species which require an instrument entirely different from their fellows have it so graciously supplied.

In the beaks of the Duck tribe one need not be particularly well educated in matters ornithological to see that it is admirably suited for dabbling in soft mud, in the same way as the beak of an Eagle, Falcon, or Owl is formed to tear to pieces its prey.



BEAK OF YOUNG
BARN OWL.

We have a beak of the first mentioned class of bird in that of the Spoonbill. This beak aids the bird very materially in sifting the mud at the bottom of pools and rivers. The singular form of the beak at once arrests attention: it is long, powerful, gradually flattening from a stout base, and at last expanding into a rounded, shovel-like termination. It is not until the third year that the young assume the colouring of the adult; and the beak—which is covered with a vascular membrane—gradually acquires its full dimensions and hardness. The Spoonbill is—like the majority of large birds—somewhat shy and retiring in its habits, and lives in society in wild wooded marshes, where it searches—with the aid of the wonderful spoon-like bill—for such food as fish, molluscs, small reptiles, the larvæ of aquatic insects, etc., and it has a sedate walk.

A very formidable beak is that of the Egyptian Vulture. In October, 1825, one of these birds—gorged with food—was shot near Kilve, in Somersetshire. The functions of this Vulture in Egypt and other parts of the East, in clearing the streets of filth of



BEAK OF WHITE-HEADED EAGLE.

every description—for which, it will be observed, the beak is so admirably adapted—are tasks which they undertake in common with the Pariah dogs, and the value of which cannot be over-estimated. Nor were its services less valued in ancient than in modern times; it was among the sacred animals of Egypt, and is often accurately represented on their monuments.

Hence the appellation of Pharaoh's Chicken. As will be seen from my drawing, the bill is slender and straight, abruptly hooked at the tip. For the benefit it confers on the people of the East, the Egyptian Vulture is still protected, and rightly so, because of its being such an industrious searcher for carrion and a veritable scavenger. It is a constant attendant on the caravan as it pursues its way from town to town.

The beak of the Owl is excellently suited for the purpose to which it is so often put. The young Barn Owl is a curious and interesting little fellow, and when a mouse is handed to him he generally ejects the well-known pellet before swallowing the tasty rodent. An Owl has been known to put away nine mice one after the other until the tail of the last hanging out of its mouth pointed to the fact that he was "full inside." Not long after, he has been quite ready for a further half-dozen! It is amusing to watch an Owl with a mouse. He takes it in his foot—which also serves as a hand—looks at it in the wise and cunning manner peculiar to the species, gives a sharp peck or two into it, a snap of the bill, and it is gone.



BEAK OF DODO.

It is said this bird never drinks, but being a prowler of the night—when the air is moist—he probably takes a sip or two at the glistening dew-drops as he glides along the meadows in search of mice, moles, rats, and reptiles, an occupation in which his beak so ably assists.

The White-Headed Eagle is a noble bird, and is the one emblazoned on the National Standard of the United States. It has a very powerful and strong beak, and it is extraordinary the heavy carrion and the like which is carried by it. It is stated on excellent authority that one has been seen flying with a lamb ten days old, but which—from the violence of its struggles—it was obliged to drop at the height of a few feet from the ground. It is very fond of fish, and

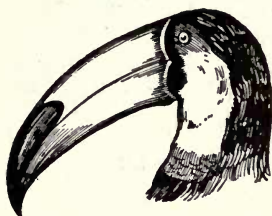


BEAK OF LAMMERGEYER.



BEAK OF GREAT AUK.

the poor Fishing Hawk who has caught a fish for himself is forced to drop it by this Eagle, who is watching operations from aloft; and so soon as it has left the Hawk, the Eagle pounces upon the fish and carries it off triumphantly in the beak which I have illustrated. It is a formidable weapon, and he uses it to much purpose.



BEAK OF TOUCAN.

The illustration at the top of page 219 is not such a powerful beak as that of the last-named, but for all that it is one that is used with much precision. The Lammergeyer—I have one before me from India as I write—has neither the bill nor the talons of the Eagle, the former—as will be seen from my sketch—being elongated and hooked only at the tip, while the latter are comparatively small; yet this bird's beak serves it well in the destruction it carries on among lambs, kids, and hares, whilst even children have, it is said, often fallen sacrifices to its rapacity. The Eagle bears off its prey; the Lammergeyer—unless disturbed, or providing for its young—seldom attempts to remove it, but devours it on the spot.

The beak of the Dodo is, perhaps, the most extraordinary one that I illustrate, but it would not be so peculiarly attractive was it not for the fact that the whole bird is most ungainly in every respect, and probably the most hideous-looking creature with feathers that was ever created. Many Scientists regret its extinction, and so do I, but methinks my lady readers will shudder at the thought of such a bird, and will be pleased to hear that it is no more. The beak is somewhat after the style of the Turkey, but a little more hooked. The Dodo was in days gone by called in the East Indies Walck-Vögel, because the longer or more slowly it was cooked, the worse it was for eating!



BEAK OF FLAMINGO.



BEAK OF AVOCET.

The next bird which receives attention is another extinct bird, but not by any means gruesome-looking, like the Dodo. There is to my mind a very superior look about the Great Auk, and it seems a great pity that such a fine bird should be lost to us for ever.

The white patch immediately behind the beak—observable in my drawing—is a very prominent set-off to what I call a first-class beak for a bird of this character. The last specimen obtained in Europe was at the islet of Eldey, in June, 1844, and yet two centuries ago we read that the bird was a regular Summer visitor to the lone island of St. Kilda!



BEAK OF WOODCOCK.



BEAK OF CURLEW.

The beak of the Toucan is one which is entirely different from any which have so far been dealt with. It is a relatively enormous beak, serrated along the free edge, which enables its possessor to obtain a firmer grasp of the fruits upon which it feeds. The illustration should be interesting to those unacquainted with the subject under consideration.

Again a great diversity presents itself in the case of the re-curved bill of the gentle Avocet—a slim, frail-looking one by the side of some of the powerful examples which have been illustrated. This is one of our lost British Birds, and was wantonly exterminated in Britain during the fore-part of the Nineteenth century. It is a beautiful and curious little bird, gentle and inoffensive. The long, upturned bill is worked by the bird from side to side in the mud, where it obtains insects and larvæ, small crustaceans, and worms. Charles Dixon notes that the captured morsel is swallowed with a toss of the head.



BEAK OF PUFFIN.



BEAK OF GUILLEMOT.

I well remember the curiosity I evinced in the Flamingo when I first saw this bird alive, and often realize why the youngsters stare with amazement when

viewing them in some Zoological collection. The length of its stilt-like legs, its gigantic neck, the comparative smallness of the body and its peculiar beak, all add to the striking curiosity which invariably calls forth the remark from the onlooker, "Well! What an extraordinary bird!"



BEAK OF MAMO.

Its long legs enable it to wade in pretty deep waters, the neck permits it to search a wide radius without moving its legs, and whatever it has captured stands a poor chance of escape when in the firm grasp of the powerful bill. Most people are acquainted with birds *sitting* in or on a nest whilst the important period of incubation is in progress, but the Flamingo rests upon a hillock in the marshes in a *standing* attitude, with the feet on the marshy ground, or even in the water.

The beak of the Woodcock I have illustrated for the purpose of showing an almost straight one, but slightly curved at the extremity. As is, perhaps, well known to my readers, this bird breeds regularly in the British Isles, a remark which similarly applies to the next bird dealt with.

A beak to be proud of, I always think, is that of the Curlew, which, it will be noticed, is gradually curved the whole length—a variation from that of the Woodcock which is extremely interesting. A curious fact regarding some of these birds is that on the South coast there is a little group of females and males which never breed. Parental care or matrimony is evidently an experiment which these particular birds do not care to undertake.



BEAK OF MACAW.

BEAK OF RHINOCEROS
HORNBILL.

Our next is indeed a curious beak, and a curious-looking bird altogether. The structure of the Puffin's beak is yet another example of the wondrous workings of Nature, for it is nearly as deep as long,

and very compressed. The bird itself is an excellent diver, and may often be seen with a row of sprats—its favourite food—hanging from the bill, their heads being secured between the mandibles; and, taking a curved sweep upwards, it bears them to its young one—for only one egg is laid.



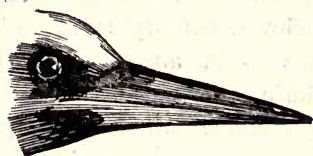
BEAK OF CROSSBILL.

In its general habits the Guillemot somewhat resembles the Puffin, and that is my reason for giving an illustration of the diversity which exists in the beaks of the two birds. There is such a marked

difference, that the two illustrations on being compared will I hope, interest, elevate, and amuse the most indifferent observer.

In the next illustration on the top of the previous page we have a beak built somewhat on the lines of the Curlew, and yet a variance will be seen. The Mamo is a lost exotic bird, whose yellow plumes were used, it is said, to embellish the State robes of chiefs.

The curious horned-bill of the Rhinoceros Hornbill is about 10 in. long, and of a yellowish white in colour; the upper mandible red at the base, the lower black. The horn on the top is varied with black and white.



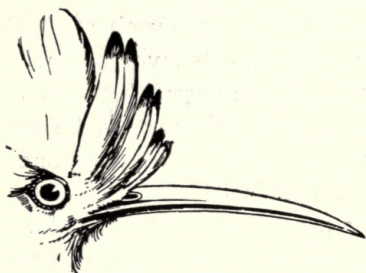
BEAK OF GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER.

One really cannot fail to be struck with this beak, and it is the nearest approach to a beak which would enable a bird to "toss" a person, with which I am acquainted. The beak without the horn would be striking, but the presence of this latter intensifies it to a remarkable degree.



BEAK OF CURL-CRESTED ARACARIS.

These are most frugivorous birds. They live mostly on fruit, and will soon strip a tree. Some of those species found in Africa are said to also feed on reptiles. Mr. Wallace says that the extraordinary habit of the male, in plastering up the female with her egg



BEAK OF HOOPOE.

and feeding her during the whole time of incubation till the young one is fledged, is common to several of the large Hornbills, and is one of those strange facts in Natural History which are 'stranger than fiction.'

Doubtless any lady readers of this article will recognise the beak of the Macaw as somewhat resembling that of their favourite "Polly." It is indeed a fine beak, and is of enormous size and strength, and enables the Macaw to prepare for digestion the fruit of a kind of palm abundant abroad in humid or marshy places.

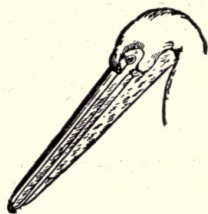
Probably the most curious beak of any bird which breeds at the present day in our own beloved country is that of the Crossbill, which has bred, among other places, in Yorkshire during the past Summer on the estate of a gentleman who affords protection to our Wild Birds. It is evident that the peculiar crossed bill of this bird enables it to more easily extricate the seeds of pine and other trees, which constitute its food.



BEAK OF ADJUTANT.

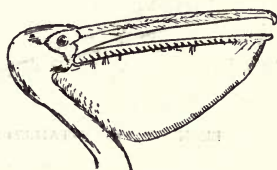
With such a tool as the Woodpecker possesses, it is small wonder the dexterity with which a hole in a tree is hewn out by these interesting birds, wherein to build the apology for a nest. It is one of the most efficient instruments possible for splitting and chipping bark or decayed wood: immensely strong and thick at its base, whence it narrows to a hard, compressed tip—which is abruptly squared off, and sharp, like a minute chisel.

The curious saw-like bill of the Curl-Crested Aracaris looks very peculiar by the side of some of the smaller beaks illustrated in this essay. The beak is

BEAK OF LATHAM'S
BARBET.BEAK OF PELICAN, SHOWING
POUCH CLOSED.

lengthened, both mandibles being edged with thickly-set white serratures. It is a bird of magnificent plumage, and no less an authority than Mr. Gould has said that it is impossible for the artist to do the bird justice.

The bill of the Hoopoe appears to me to be of the exact construction for setting off to perfection the general structure of this remarkable and beautiful bird. The long beak suits the bird admirably for searching among rotten wood and the bark of trees for insects, upon which it feeds. Bechstein gives an interesting account of some of these birds kept in captivity, which were very fond of beetles and May-bugs; these they first killed and then beat them with their beak into a kind of oblong ball. Without doubt, this lovely bird would breed with us if not shot whenever seen, and that it is has bred of late years I personally have no hesitation in saying, for the reason that a friend once saw, a few years back in Sussex, two parent birds and three or four young ones just able to fly.



BEAK OF PELICAN, SHOWING
POUCH OPEN.

The beak of Latham's Barbet always strikes me as being a very curious one, because of the presence of the hairs or little feather-stems—or whatever they may be most accurately called—as illustrated in my sketch of this bird's bill. The beak is conical, slightly compressed, and a little elevated in the middle.

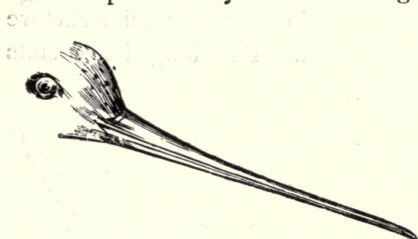


BEAK AND TONGUE OF
WRYNECK.

The Adjutant is yet another bird which calls forth amazement, which is probably due to the bird's strange look as well as its curious postures and attitudes. The Adjutant with shoulders shrugged, is certainly a very striking bird and its powerful beak adds to it in a marked degree.

Visitors to St. James's and other London parks are well acquainted with the Pelicans there located, and an illustration of their wonderful bill is interesting. It is very long, broad,

flattened, and straight, with a hooked projection at the extremity of the upper mandible. To see these birds plunge their long beaks and necks under water, and net the fish in their capacious pouches, is a sight worth seeing, and the dimensions of the pouch may well be imagined when I state that it is so



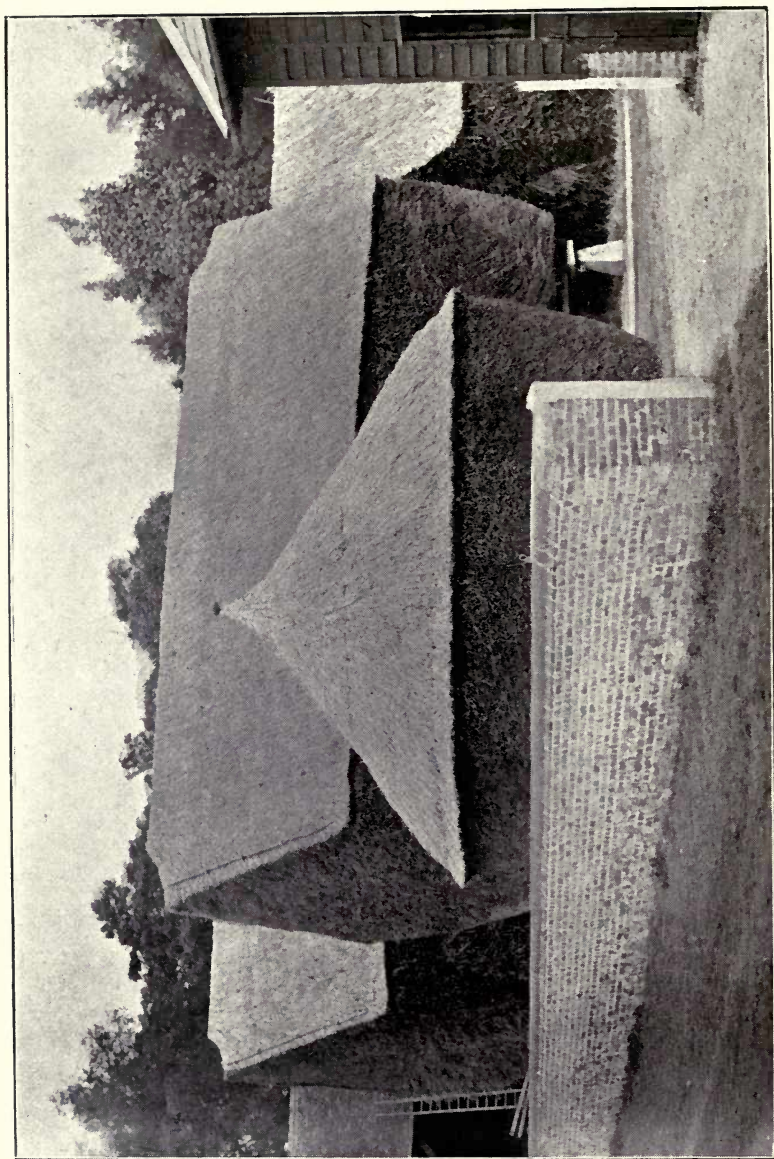
BEAK OF BLACK-TAILED GODWIT.

dilatable as to be capable of containing two gallons of water; yet the bird has the power of contracting this membranous expansion, by wrinkling it up under the lower mandible until it is scarcely to be seen!

The illustration of the Wryneck enables me to exhibit the beak and tongue of this bird, the long, retractile tongue affording it the opportunity of taking insects from the ant-hills, which it visits in a similar manner to the Green Woodpecker.

My last illustration is certainly not by any means the least as regards its proportions. It is a very long beak, more or less curved upwards, and soft and flexible. This Godwit is practically an extinct British Bird, and with the remark that it undergoes—with other allied species—a double moult, which nearly changes the entire colour of the plumage and has led to some confusion, my little sketch closes.

OCTOBER.



A MODEL STACK-YARD.

NATURE IN OCTOBER.

IT seems as recent as yesterday that we were complaining of the terrible heat and longing for a change to cooler weather. It is here all too soon for it is quite chilly now, and as I write, although it is only six in the evening, the Bat has commenced its night prowls, and the last long straggling flock of Rooks has passed overhead to the roost trees. Last month it will be remembered I mentioned a very beautiful Caterpillar found in my garden. It was the Caterpillar of the Privet Hawk Moth. The main colour is yellowish green, on either side it has seven stripes of heliotrope and white, which, as seen on the yellowish green ground, is one of the most beautiful blendings in Nature, and a wonderful example of her handiwork. All Caterpillars of the Hawk Moths have a horny protuberance at the extremity of the back; the curved horn on the Privet Hawk Moth Caterpillar is shiny black, yellowish at the base. It has a dark green head, four large double sets of crawlers and three small double sets, as well as two at the extremity.

I can only add here that these Caterpillars possess wonderful clinging powers, and to watch them feeding is a study in itself. They dig into the privet leaves as quickly and as successfully as a circular saw goes through a log, and when I state that one in my possession devoured thirty privet leaves in eight hours it will be seen that a hedge of privet invaded by a horde of these creatures may soon be stripped of every vestige of foliage. The Goat Moth Caterpillar, too, is a very beautiful one, having a patch of chestnut red on the back of each segment of its long body, with an entirely black head.

It does not consume the foliage of trees like so many other Caterpillars, but derives its nutriment from the solid wood, which it readily comminutes by the action of its jaws.

As I have commenced my October sketch by a reference to Caterpillars of the Hawk Moths, it is interesting to notice that

during the summer of 1899 the Humming Bird Hawk Moth was exceedingly plentiful, and many residents in the country mistook the Moth for a Humming Bird, owing no doubt to the rapidity of the Moth's flight. The late A. H. Haworth, in his delightful volume on "British Lepidoptera," thus describes it—"This interesting species, in the winged state, frequents gardens, flying in sunny weather during most of the day. Its food is the nectareous juice of the tube-bearing flowers. This it extracts with amazing address by the assistance of its exerted spiral tongue, inimitably posing itself all the while on rapidly vibrating wings, whence its name of Humming Bird. It is delightful indeed to behold and contemplate the dexterity exhibited by this charming insect whilst it sails, all gaiety and grace, round the tall sprig of a lark-spur, or other flower, probing to the very bottom every single tube, neglecting none, and trying no one twice." The colour of the fore-wings is brown with blackish transverse markings, and of the hind-wing orange with brownish fringes. The body is brown, and has a caudal tuft of black hairs, which is capable of being expanded and shut up. Hot weather is, as a rule, favourable to insect life, and the summer of 1899 was a notable instance of this.

The sparkling little Copper Butterfly is described by Stainton as "October's one Butterfly," but on warm days the Red Admiral may still be seen. During the Summer named it was more plentiful than I have ever known it to be. The Gamma Moth is to be seen on bright Autumn days, as well as the Many Plumed Moth. The Crane Fly—commonly known as the Daddy Long Legs—is about too, and although a far cry from the insect world, this is the Fungi Season.

When sere leaves fall we know that the Summer is past, and Winter is fast approaching. To the Ornithologist it is a somewhat melancholy season for the reason that his favourite feathered visitors have nearly all departed. It is at the Autumn season, when the golden and bronzed leaves flutter carelessly to mother earth, that our thoughts often wander to the birds which have been with us during the Summer. I suppose that of all the wonderful and varying traits in the character of a bird, there is nothing more marvellous than the way in which migration movements are conducted, and I am often

asked by an enthusiastic enquirer to say how our smaller birds, such as the Chiff Chaff, the Willow Wren, the two White-throats, the Wood Warbler, and many others, accomplish the task of travelling thousands upon thousands of miles, from clime to clime, without resting. How these tiny creatures which, when amongst us in this fair free land of ours only seem able to flit from twig to twig along some sunlit hedgerow, or the Corncrake which runs through the cornfield, never hardly seen on the wing whilst here in England and more often heard than seen at all, endure such long and protracted flights, crossing the Mediterranean, the Bay of Biscay, and the English Channel, is one of those extraordinary feats which present day Science has not, so far as I understand it, altogether cleared up to everyone's satisfaction.

Among the many mysteries of bird migration is the fact that over-sea journeys are generally conducted in the darkness, and invariably against a head wind!

The happy and busy life which our Summer migrants live whilst they are with us strikes me as being delightful and interesting, and many of them seem loth to quit our shores when the time arrives for them to seek more congenial climes. Most of them cannot know an idle moment, for so soon as they arrive here they commence the work of nidification, and when they have finished the important and busy task of raising their broods, they at once congregate, preparatory to winging their way across the sea. I have observed migrants morning after morning congregating, and had wished that it would last long, but one fine September morn when the first golden-red beams flashed across the dew-spattered meadows my friends prepared to depart and were bidden adieu by a trilling lay from a Lark, the chirping of some noisy Sparrows on the housetops, the twittering of a few Martins and Swallows, or the sweet pæan of a Redbreast.

As I have previously noted, most of the visitors have all taken their departure by September, and it is not necessary that I should enumerate the dates. When October winds blow, the only Summer visitors left to us are the Swallow family and a few young Cuckoos perhaps.

One of the most interesting birds to be observed at this



A PAIR OF KINGFISHERS.

season of the year is the Tawny Owl. I have found young in the nest as late as the middle of the month. The House Sparrows are back again in my garden and are glad to avail themselves of the food thrown down for them. They are still breeding in my water-spout, and many of the females are bob-tailed. This is doubtless due to continual sitting.

The plentifulness of Holly berries, red and green, and the flowering Ivy is very noticeable. All around leaves are falling, the trees are casting off their rich Summer dress for the plain but necessary garb of Winter. We know, however, that for nearly every leaf that falls there is a bud forming which will in the early Spring burst in all its richness.

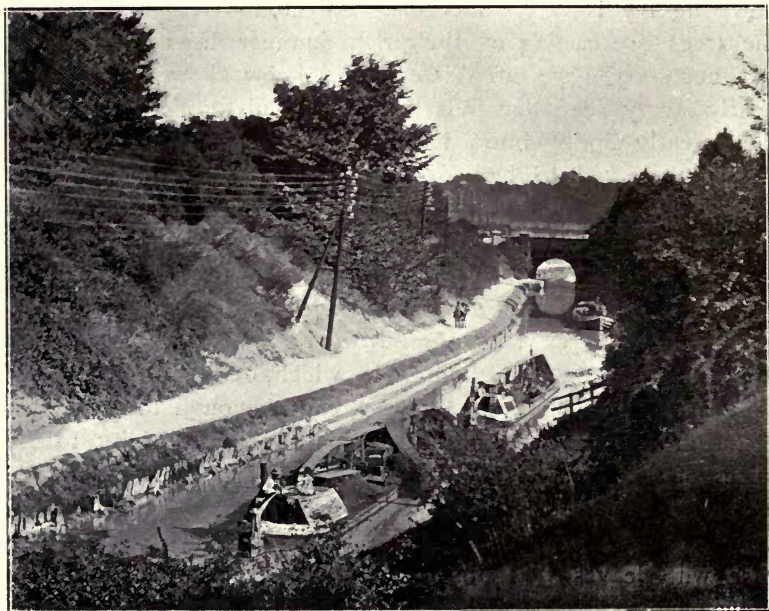
How beautiful to look from some eminence during October at the colours and tints of the Autumn foliage! Golden mingling with silver and rich dark red; various shades of brown battling with primrose yellow; light and dark greens, white, blue and ochre. It is stated that the changing of the colour in Autumn leaves is supposed to be caused by the trees absorbing oxygen during the night, which, owing to the coldness of the weather, they have not strength enough to throw out again in the daytime, and that this gives an acidity to the juices of the tree which changes the colour of the leaf, or that, otherwise, they would be pushed down by the new buds in all their green Summer array. Some admit that this may be the case with leaves that are red, but not with others that are brown and yellow.

How bold and green the Fir trees stand out at this season, against the browns, reds, and yellows of Oak and Cherry, Beech and Lime, and the golden Horse Chestnut! The Walnut is one of the earliest trees to shed its Summer dress. What a pity it seems for these mansions to fall toppling to the ground, but the all-wise hand of Nature admits of no criticism.

How the acorns and chestnuts come pelting down when the wind blows, and if we hide ourselves under the spreading chestnut trees we may have the good fortune to see a Squirrel or a Wood Mouse go scampering along with the fruit of the acorn in its mouth.

One of the grandest sights during this month is to pay a visit to a well wooded park where Deer are kept. It may not

generally be known that Red Deer are extremely fond of Horse Chestnuts. This is the rutting season, notice the swelling necks, and the perfect antlers, all in fighting trim. The swimming powers of the Deer are extraordinary. I actually knew of a fawn which had only been in the world a few moments taking to the river and swimming across to the opposite bank, half



THE BRIDGEWATER CANAL.

a mile across, and then back again! They resent any interference at this season.

Running through the park we visited is the Grand Junction Canal, a wonderful English waterway. The barge men and women are a happy-go-lucky set of individuals, but they are not any too kind to the horses which tow them along.

What pretty sylvan scenes they glide through and what delightful spots and attractive bends one notices when walking along the tow path! At several spots the canal is skirted with

osier and reed patches. It is here that the Sedge, Reed, and Marsh Warblers are found during the Summer, together with the Reed Bunting. Turning away from these scenes across some meadow land, and then through a spinney, we observe that the Nuts are dead ripe; we stand and watch the woodmen felling four grand old Chestnut trees and a Black Poplar, paying particular attention to the curious fruit of the latter.

In the early October mornings the dew glistens brightly as the sun rises. It rises later now and sets earlier. It is a pouring wet morning, but the Robin sings for all he is worth. I very rarely see a Redbreast which does not sing.

The arrival and departure of our Summer migrants has already been alluded to, and the same remarks apply to the Autumn visitors. The Fieldfare and the Redwing are with us now, as also the Jack Snipe, and there has been an influx of Woodcocks. The Black Tailed Godwit visits us in the Autumn, but is now extinct as a British Breeding Bird. The Skylark has been very silent of late, but he will find that trilling lay of his again shortly.

Early in the month the Hop season ends, and it is interesting to note that it is the last ingathering that finds employment for the poor of the Country.

The Autumn sunbeams are thrown on the pool, and a Moorhen or Little Grebe goes swimming right across. Glancing into the water we may see the Great Water Beetle, and in light sandy districts the curious Burying Beetle. In the willows one may find the Armadillo Woodlouse. These creatures burrow and tunnel in the trunks and branches so as to riddle it with holes, so much so that when struck or tapped it appears to be hollow. The Woodpeckers and Creepers find these trees out; they love Woodlice. The Elder-berries are quite ripe, and so are the berries of the Privet. Bullfinches are very fond of the latter. The Meadow Saffron is in bloom, together with Hare-bells, and Ling. Great White Bindweed is about, as well as Teasel, and Blackberries. The Greenfinch is very partial to the last named berries.

Passing on, the observer notices that the Hornbeam retains its foliage until Spring. Our last botanical remark this month is as to the loveliness of the various Wall Creepers at this

season. They are far too delicate and beautiful to escape our attention.

The flocks do not remain in the fields now as the nights are too cold, and they are driven to the folds. We close our essay for October by a reference to Oak-Galls or Oak-Balls. These are caused by the Gall Fly. Shortly stated, the insect deposits its eggs in the young twigs, the sap soon commences to gather, the balls gradually form and harden. The grub within feeds for a time upon the soft spongy interior, and when ready to quit drills a small hole and casts itself upon the wide unthinking world.

A STUDY IN BIRDS' TAILS.

WHEN one looks carefully and minutely into the various branches of Ornithology, the interesting and useful information that is imparted is indeed wonderful.

Who, for instance, would imagine that there existed such a vast difference in the structure of birds' tails? Yet, as will be seen from this illustrated article, the diversity is truly astonishing to the unobservant, and even to the cultivated eye of the Naturalist.

The tails of our British Birds do not vary nearly so much as those of tropical and foreign climes, and therefore this sketch will deal chiefly with those possessed by feathered wonders across the seas. If our attention was not directed to these variances, we should probably never, during our brief three score years and ten, realise to the full in what a degree they exist. Even bird-lovers who have lived in the country the whole of their lives, and have had Swallows and Martins as companions for years, do not know what an easy matter it is to distinguish between the two birds—if by no other characteristic by the formation of their tail feathers.

In the first two illustrations we have the tails of the Swallow and the House Martin, and an examination will show the reader how the two tails differ. That of the Swallow is conspicuously forked, whilst the gentle little Martin is distinguished by the less forked character of the tail. This difference is even more apparent when the birds are seen flying, especially when directly overhead. One hears the remark occasionally from a country wag that "You never see a Martin without a *swallow*." This is not to be disputed, but at the same time it may be equally true that a person may think himself well-educated in bird-lore without being able accurately to point out the differences which exist in the two birds. Country people—and town-folk, too, for that matter—still persist in calling the Swift, Swallow, Martin, and

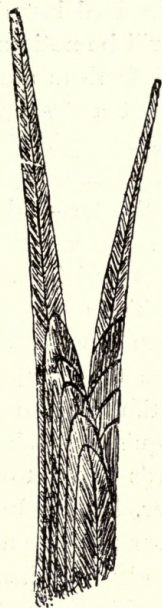
Sand-Martin all Swallows, in the same manner as Rooks and Crows are to some people all Crows. It seems curious that, although so much attention is being given by the Press of our Country to our British Birds, and that probably no Country in the wide world has had so many books written about its birds as our own beloved Britain, such utter ignorance should still prevail, and that in spite of the fact that bird literature is published at a popular price, well within the reach of the peasant as well as the peer.

The tail of that interesting bird the Nightjar, is shapely and well-proportioned and materially adds to the bird's graceful aerial movements, which are conducted when twilight shadows fall; when all Nature is hushed.

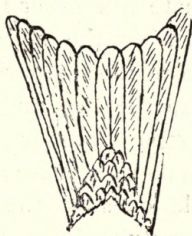
This bird is called in some localities the Night-Hawk, and owing to this is often persecuted—all Hawks are—but in defence of the bird it is only fair to state that it does absolutely no harm; on the contrary, it is most beneficial in the destruction of myriads of Moths, Chaffers, and other large insects, during its nocturnal exploitations. A curious trait in the character of the Nightjar is that it does not sit on a tree crosswise, as birds in general do, but lengthwise, and rests upon it, instead of grasping it, and that with the head low, so as to almost touch it. It builds no nest, laying its two eggs upon the bare ground.

The tail of the Leona Nightjar at once arrests attention, and shows in a truly marvellous manner how the tails of two birds of the same species, closely allied, may differ in their formation and construction. The two long elastic shafts which issue from the middle of the wing coverts, vary in length from eight or ten to twenty inches. They are tipped with a broad web for three, four, or five inches, and occur only in the male, the female being entirely destitute of these long shafted or supplementary feathers. It appears that the tail of the male is more ornamental than useful, inasmuch as both sexes would possess the same if it was essential to the economy of the species, unless the highly improbable supposition is true that the male feeds in one manner and the female in another.

In their texture the tail feathers are of an extraordinary flexible character, and are blown about with the least breath of wind.



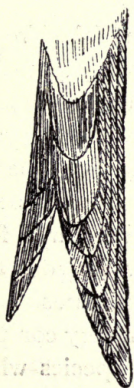
SWALLOW.
(Fig. 1.)



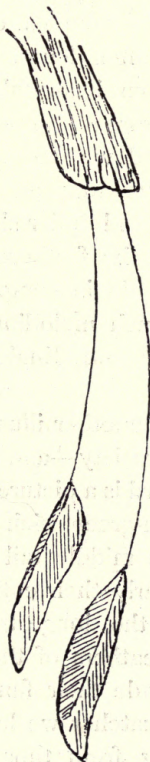
NIGHTJAR.
(Fig. 3.)



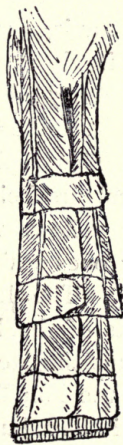
TERNATE KINGFISHER.
(Fig. 5.)



HOUSE MARTIN.
(Fig. 2.)



LEONA NIGHTJAR.
(Fig. 14.)



MEXICAN TROGON.
(Fig. 6.)

In the tail of the Ternate Kingfisher I am enabled to illustrate one which is somewhat after the style of the bird last dealt with, but yet on close inspection a variance will be noticeable. It is a graduated tail, and the two middle tail feathers are the longest. This is a gorgeously plumed bird, but a description of its tail feathers must suffice. These are white, margined with cerulean, the two middle ones of the same, proceeding to a narrowness, and ending spatulate, the web of the terminal portion being white. It is related that those specimens brought to Europe are very often destitute of the wings and legs.

Truly a remarkable tail is that of the Mexican Trogon, being $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches long; the two middle tail feathers are green with black tips, the two next on each side wholly black, the three outer on each side black, with white tips. It is a beautiful creature, and one of those wonderful examples of the exquisite touches of splendour which are so often found in the birds of the tropics. We pride ourselves on our beautiful Kingfisher, but our British Birds have not such a gorgeous range of colour as those found in tropical Countries, and we find we are poorly off when we bring such beauties as the Mexican Trogon beside them. The more sombre vegetation and duller skies of Great Britain suggest a more modest garb for the feathered tribe. What we lose in plumage, however, we gain in song, for the birds of the New World do not possess such melodious notes as our own Merle and Mavis, for instance, and England has the sweetest songsters in the whole world.

In Fig. 7 we have yet another illustration of one of the Trogon order—the Resplendent variety—and it is very correctly named as such. This resplendent bird is a picture of dazzling beauty, amongst the colours being golden-green, rich crimson, scarlet, and gamboge yellow, whilst the middle tail feathers are black, the six outer ones white for nearly their entire length, their bases being black. The length of the longest plume is about three feet. It was of the brilliant feathers of these and other Trogons that the ancient Mexicans made their famous mosaic pictures.

In the Fan-Tailed Flycatcher we have a tail of a very compact description, but differing from those of the two species which visit the British Isles during the Summer, although in its general habits it much resembles them. It is a native of New Holland,

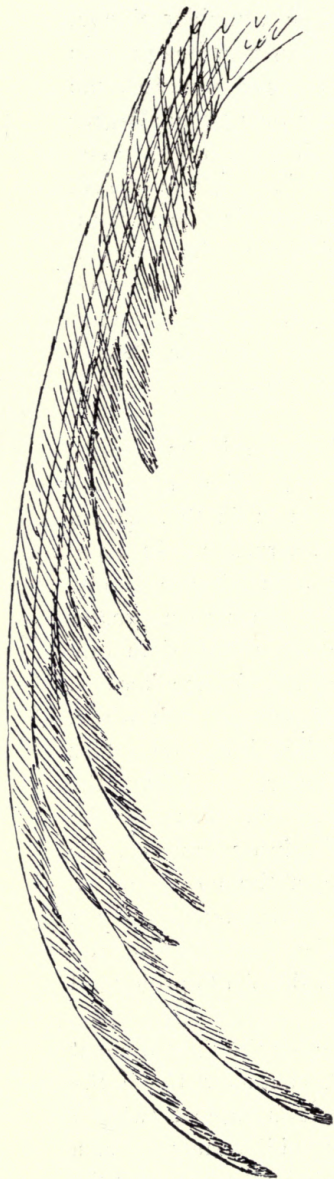
and Mr. Caley says that "it frequents the small trees and bushes, from which it darts suddenly at its prey, spreading out its tail like a fan, and to appearance turning over like a tumbler pigeon, and then immediately returning to the same twig or bough from which it sprang." The tail is long, ample, and rounded, the lateral feathers are more or less white, there being some degree of variation in the extent to which this colour pervades them.

A curious diversity exists in the tail of Cunningham's Bush Shrike when compared with the tail of the bird last dealt with. Mr. Vigors named the bird after Colonel Cunningham of Rio Janeiro. In some respects this Shrike appears to be somewhat similar to that of our own Red-Backed variety but the murdering propensities of the last-named do not, I believe, exist in Cunningham's Bush Shrike. The tail is brownish black, whilst the general colour of the bird is ash grey.

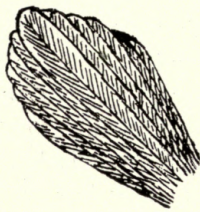
The Black-Cap Titmouse is somewhat similar in its general colouring to that of the British Marsh Tit. The tail of the American species, however, is worth inclusion in this article, being of a very attractive and formidable description. In many respects this Tit resembles our own indigenous Titmice family, but, according to Nuttall, the Black-Cap Tit feeds to a greater extent upon seeds of many kinds, particularly those of an oily description, such as the Sunflower, Pine, and Spruce kernels. The tail feathers are blackish grey, edged with greyish white.

The tail of the Long-Winged Swift is strikingly curious. This is a species of a very singular group of Swifts, which have the tail-feathers spined, and even more rigid than those of the Woodpeckers; by this structure, as Mr. Swainson remarks, the birds can remain for a considerable time in the most perpendicular situations. The expanded tail, he adds, thus acts as a powerful support, which is further increased by the size and strength of the claws. It is a short tail, with the shafts prolonged into acute points.

The Paradise Whydah Bird is remarkable for the development of long caudal plumes in the male bird, characteristic of the breeding season, and subsequently lost. It is subject twice a year to changes of plumage, which, it is said, results in such a marked difference that it is with some difficulty one and the same bird is recognised. The long feathers fall off towards the



RESPLENDENT TROGON.
(Fig. 7.)



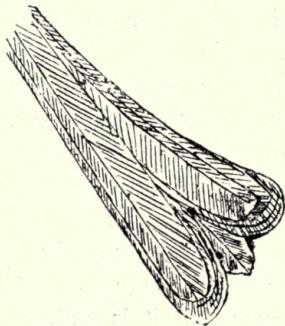
FAN-TAILED FLYCATCHER.
(Fig. 8.)



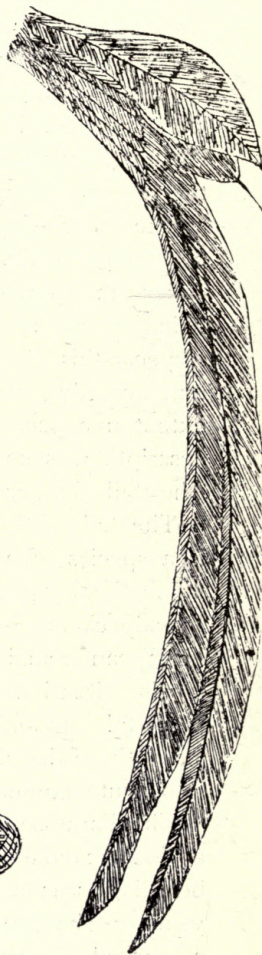
LONG-WINGED SWIFT.
(Fig. 11.)



CUNNINGHAM'S
BUSH SHRIKE.
(Fig. 9.)



BLACK-CAP TITMOUSE.
(Fig. 10.)



PARADISE WHYDAH BIRD.
(Fig. 12.)

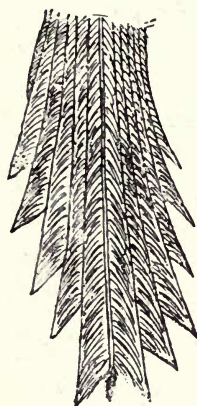
end of Autumn, and, with the other changes which take place, little difference is apparent between that of the male bird and his plainer mate. The long tail feathers are recovered in the Spring. The bird is about the size of a Sparrow.

Both the Trimmed and the Wandering Pies have very curious and attractive tails, the one in Fig. 13 being that of the first-named variety. It is a native of Cochin China. The bird is chiefly remarkable for its graduated tail, which is about twelve inches long. Each of these feathers appears as if cut and trimmed at the tip with a pair of scissors. There is nothing else very striking about the Trimmed Pie, and it only remains for me to say that the whole of the plumage is black, a little lustrous on the wings and tail.

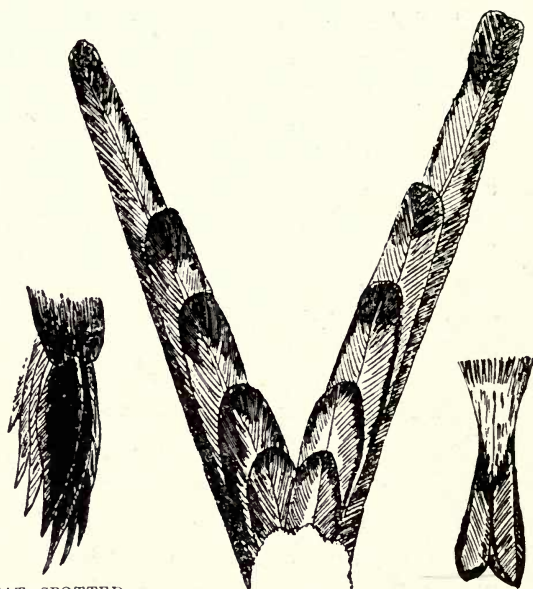
One does not notice the curiously sharp-cut feathers of the last-mentioned bird in the tail of the Wandering Pie, but for all that it is such as to claim a place in this little sketch. The tail is grey, each feather being tipped largely with black. In regard to the name by which this Pie is known, it is interesting to quote what Mr. Gould wrote of the bird. He says: "The specific denomination of this bird is bestowed upon it in consequence of its peculiar habit of life. The *Pica Vagabunda*, or Wandering Pie, unlike the typical Pies—who remain constantly stationary in one neighbourhood, seeking for their food in its vicinity—wanders from place to place, travelling over a large space of ground, and not evincing a partiality for any particular situation."

The tail of the British Cuckoo is well worth illustrating. There are ten tail-feathers, which are of unequal length: the two middle ones are black, dashed with ash and tipped with white, the rest black, with white spots on each side of the shaft. It strikes one as a rather curiously-constructed tail, there appearing to be so many component parts; but all very neatly fit in, and it is a tail of which any bird might be proud; simple in colouring, it is true, but very attractive in formation.

In the tail of the Great Spotted Woodpecker—a bird which is probably more abundant in our Country than is generally supposed—a very curious diversity exists when compared with that of the Cuckoo. The feathers are finished off very sharply, and this is a typical specimen of the tails of a good many of



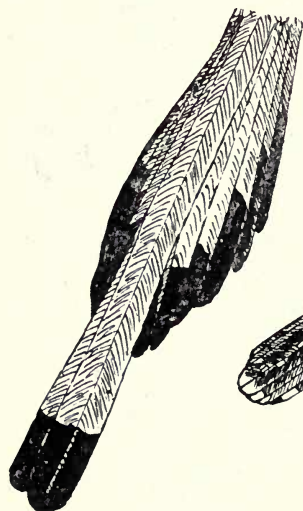
TRIMMED PIE.
(Fig. 13.)



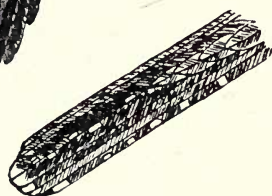
GREAT SPOTTED
WOODPECKER.
(Fig. 16.)

BAR-TAILED HUMMING BIRD.
(Fig. 17.)

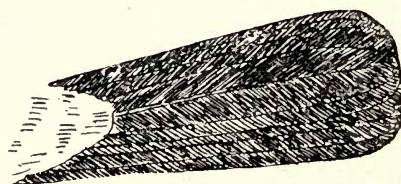
YELLOW
BUNTING.
(Fig. 18.)



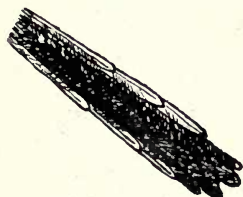
WANDERING PIE.
(Fig. 14.)



CUCKOO.
(Fig. 15.)



JAY. (Fig. 19.)



LONG-TAILED TIT. (Fig. 22.)



TROPIC BIRD.
(Fig. 21.)



SEDGE WARBLER. (Fig. 20.)

the Woodpecker family. The four centre tail feathers are black, the rest are more or less white, and spotted near the tip with black; under surface, white.

That ever interesting and wonderful species—the Humming Birds—supply us with many curiosities and traits of bird life, and pages might be devoted to them alone. An illustration of the tail of the Bar Tailed Humming-Bird will be sufficient to show one of their divergencies. Compare this bar-tail with that of the Woodpecker, and the reader will at once see a forcible illustration of the variances of Nature's workings. This variety is at once identified by the shape of its tail, which is forked at the base, and consists of two diverging portions, each containing five feathers, graduating in length one beyond another. Their colour is of the richest flame, or bright orange red, with a dazzling metallic lustre and a broad mark of black at the tip

The tail of the Yellow Bunting is not particularly attractive, in fact, rather of an ordinary description, and this is why I am illustrating it, for the reason that when placed side by side with the tail of, say, the Resplendent Trogon, even the most unobservant must confess to the correctness of my opening remarks as to the truly astonishing variance which exists even in birds' tails. The tail of the Yellow Hammer—by which name this bird is more generally known—is slightly forked, dusky, edged with greenish-yellow, the two outer feathers marked with white on the exterior webs.

What has been very accurately termed the "Sentinel of the Woods"—the Jay—is a very beautifully plumed bird, and although the tail is not very attractive as regards its colouring, it is of a character which warrants its inclusion here, and as diversity is my watchword, I give an illustration of it.

The tail of this crafty, cunning bird is black. It is probably the most beautifully coloured specimen of the Crow tribe.

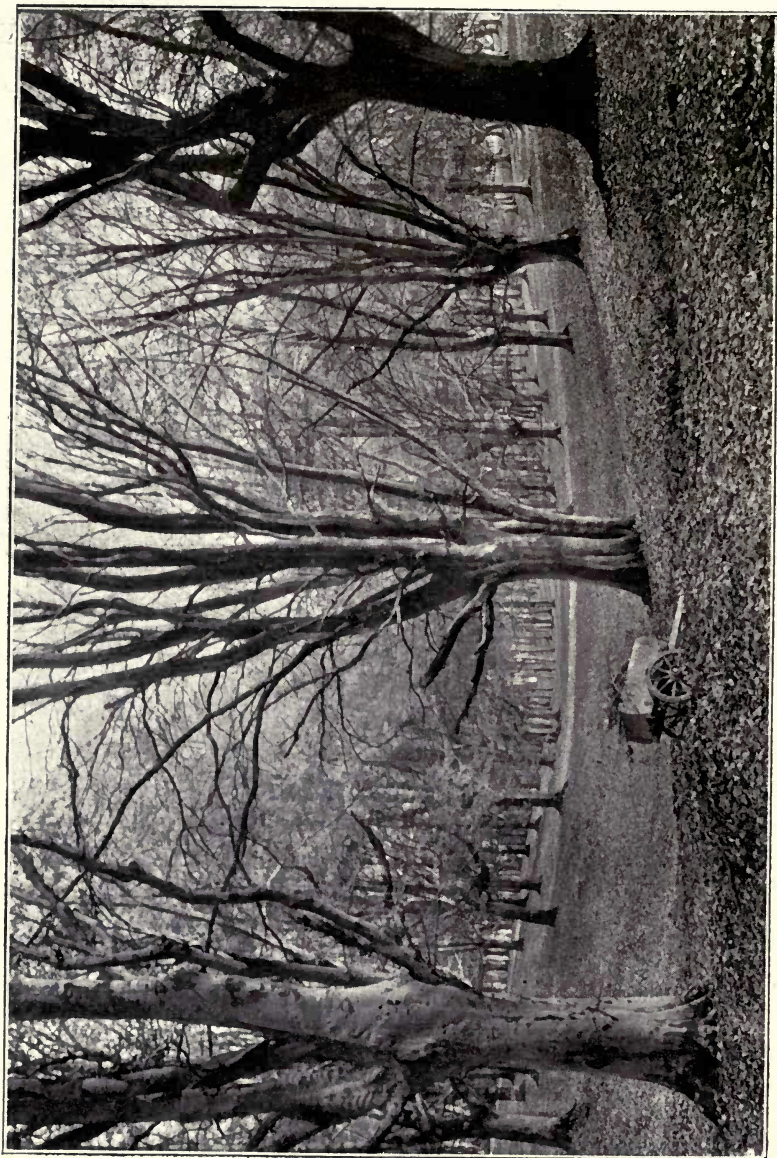
The tail of the little Sedge Warbler next claims our attention. When spread—as my sketch depicts—it gives it the appearance of a rounded shape. The country-side would indeed lose a charm minus this interesting bird. It possesses the imitative faculty in great perfection, and may be heard uttering the notes of many British Song Birds with much precision and exactness.

The Tropic Bird is at once distinguished by its two long slender tail feathers. This is a bird of the air, and its length of wing and comparatively feeble feet proclaim it formed for flight. It is often met with a great distance away from land, is well known to navigators, and is rarely observed on land for any length of time.

My last illustration is that of the tail of the Long-Tailed Tit, and, as its name implies, its tail is a distinguishing feature. This Tit is a member of the industrious and useful Titmice family. The tail is very long and wedge-shaped, the lateral feathers are white on the external barbs, and at their ends. It is worth noticing, in conclusion, that this bird constructs probably the most beautiful nest of any of our British Birds; the competition for premier honours lies between it and the Chaffinch. Well might I quote Longfellow's lines in closing:—

‘Do you ne’er think what wondrous beings these?
Do you ne’er think who made them, and who taught
The dialect they speak, where melodies
Alone are the interpreters of thought?
Whose household words are songs in many keys,
Sweeter than instrument of man e’er caught,
Whose habitations in the tree tops even,
Are half-way houses on the road to heaven.’

NOVEMBER.



A CARPET OF LEAVES.

NATURE IN NOVEMBER.

THE Frontispiece to this month's sketch admirably portrays the scene in the woods in November.

Standing underneath the trees how the wind howls, but it is delightful to be out and about on a November morn if the rambler keeps on the move, and now that the leaves are nearly all off the trees many sights meet the eye that were unseen when the trees and hedgerows wore their Summer dresses.

Everything *seems* desolate and bare, here and there a cluster of Berries relieves the surroundings somewhat, but a closer inspection into Nature for November reveals sights and sounds that the less acute observer can hardly contemplate.

I always think that the brooks and the rivers seem in a greater hurry to babble along in this month than at any other period of the year. True enough they are swollen and the volume of water being carried is well up to high water mark, but as one stands gazing into the rushing stream it seems as if it is in a terrible hurry to reach the ocean and bury itself in its mighty depths. At this season it has no beautiful Water Forget-me-nots to stop and caress, no giant Marsh Marigolds to stop and make love to, no yellow-breasted Wagtails to stop and watch in their many pleasing antics; there are no flowering Rushes and Flags to pay tribute to; they are all gone, and there is methinks some excuse for the rushing on. At this season the cattle seem desolate and miserable, but on a fine warm morning they forget themselves and indulge in playful skirmishes and try to think it is Springtime again.

Rambling along we come across an old shed, but it is empty, and daylight can be seen through it in several places. It is a dismal looking place to shelter in if a storm suddenly comes along; it is rank, mildewed, and fast going to decay. Let us turn to another side of the picture—this is the Bracken season; it beautifies every wild place with its graceful form. It grows



NOVEMBER WOODS.

to a tremendous height in some localities, one is enabled to walk right through with towering Bracken well above the head and shoulders. The localities it loves best, and in which it flourishes, are wild and damp, where there is a warm climate and good soil, though it must not be forgotten that it is found also in situations where the soil is of a poor nature. In Ireland it has been known to grow to the height of twelve feet, whilst a fern grown in the south of Hampshire reached the phenomenal height of fourteen feet!



SOWING BROADCAST.

How the Rabbits scamper out as one pushes his way through, the crackling stems frightening the wary little animals, and startling various birds which are seeking the shelter afforded.

During this month we may perchance light upon the farm labourer sowing broadcast; no sooner are the crops safely harboured than the diligent farmer prepares his land to give unto us a future store.

Besides being the Bracken season, November is also the season of Berries. Amongst others I have found during this

month are the Hips and Haws, Sloes, Blackberries, Bullaces, Cloud-berries, Bilberries, Alsgame, Cranberries, Mountain Ash, Butcher's Broom, Holly, Ivy, Privet, the scarlet berries of the Woody Nightshade, Wild Cornel, Bird Cherry, and so on. The Spindle tree, too, attracts our attention more than at any other time because of its beautiful waxen seed vessels.

Above us the clouds appear heavy and miserable, rolling on and on with hardly any change. How different to the blue June sky and the glorious July sunset. We pass a man carry-



A PAIR OF BARN OWLS (WINTER PLUMAGE.)

ing faggots, and in a friendly chat with us the old fellow gives it as his opinion that we shall have a mild, or, as the case may be, a severe Winter.

During this month mention should be made of those animals that store up food for the Winter, and amongst others may be mentioned the Squirrel, Hedgehog, Dormouse, and Long Tailed Field Mouse. A store of food is always at hand and as many as five hundred nuts and acorns have been taken out of a storehouse of one of the animals named.

During November the screech of an Owl sounds very weird and desolate, and small wonder is it that old country people associate with it a death warning and other curious superstitions.

Mr. Stone's photograph of a pair of Barn Owls—a study from still life—is very appropriate just now. This Owl is one of the most beautiful birds breeding in Britain, and the good these birds do is inestimable.

High up in the air a flock of Wild Geese may perchance be seen, or, failing them, a few Herons, or Moll Hens as they are commonly called by country people, and the trained Naturalist looks for that V-shaped flock of Wild Ducks. The trilling Skylark has started singing again; no matter how unpropitious the weather, there he is up aloft singing as if it was a warm Spring morning!

Nothing is so beautiful at this time of the year as the song of a Thrush. In his song one seems to imagine that the bird cannot stand the coming Winter solitude, and perched on the branch of some naked bough he pours out those joyous notes which Macgillivray defines most beautifully thus—

‘Dear, dear, dear,
In the rocky glen,
Far away, far away, far away,
The haunts of men
Here shall we dwell in love,
With the lark and dove,
Cuckoo and cornrail.
Feast on the banded snail,
Worm and gilded fly,
Drink of the crystal rill,
Winding adown the hill,
Never to dry.

With glee, with glee, with glee,
Cheer up, cheer up, cheer up, here
Nothing to harm us, then sing merrily,
Sing to the loved one whose nest is near.
Qui, qui, qui, kweeu, quip,
Tiurru, tiurra, chipiwi,
Too-tee, too-tee, chinchoo,
Chirri, chirri, chooe,ee,
Quiu, qui, qui.’

There is indeed a sermon, and although some of the stanzas are somewhat out of place in November the placing of the words is no less poetical and worthy of understanding to the Nature soul.

The Bryony is out now, and even in muggy November a Red Admiral Butterfly may still be seen occasionally.

It is a grand sight to watch a Sparrow Hawk or a Kestrel in this month for, if either hie away to some distant tree, by the aid of a powerful field-glass their actions and pranks may easily be followed.

In the deep holes of the river, where it is somewhat clear, we may spend half-an-hour or so watching the well-marked Perch. He is a game fighter, and gives the angler plenty of sport for his money.

On a tangled bush by the wayside, Honeysuckle may still be found in flower, but it seems to have lost much of its sweet aroma. This lovely flower never smells half so sweet and delicious as when its petals are first opened. Fresh green leaves appear all through the Winter and help to keep up the Nature lover's enthusiasm. The Traveller's Joy too still abounds. What a fine background this latter makes for a rosy-red Bullfinch. He never looks better than at this period of the year.

It is interesting to watch the Jackdaws and Rooks now; how well they cog in together, the Daws toying in the air, now circling, now falling, now flying straight ahead, up and down, then round and round, and finally stationary. The Starlings too join in with the Daws and Rooks, and it is no uncommon sight to see all three varieties on the same roost trees.

The various Mosses must not be overlooked during this month, and the old brown Water Vole calls for special notice.

In the South we are often favoured with small flocks of Crossbills and Snow Buntings, though I have seen what might be called large flocks of both birds. The Crossbills resort in Somersetshire to the Cider Mills where the waste is very much to their liking, but the Buntings I have found during the Winter months around farmyards.

It is interesting to watch the Pigeons at the cote, flying round, tumbling in the air, then resting and gracefully walking, picking up a stray grain or two.



THE PIGEON COTE.

The Dunlins and Curlews are well worth observing at this season, as well as the five or six Gulls. Notice that the Black-headed Gull is no longer black-headed now—he has lost the distinguishing mark and on the wing may be mistaken for one of his relations. The Whimbrel, too, is a most interesting bird and repays a careful study, a remark which also applies to the Comorant and the Shag, the graceful Terns, the Guillemots, and the Puffin. All birds are, however, interesting, but these few varieties specially present themselves to me as I pen these lines.

Thus we leave what is generally termed as muggy November for December, the closing month with which we have to deal.

A STUDY IN BIRDS' CLAWS, TALONS, AND FEET.

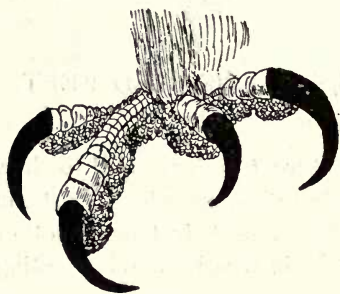
IN my last two articles of this nature I endeavoured to shew the interest that is awakened, and the diversity which exists, in Birds' Beaks and Tails, but in the present instance another extremity is chosen which is as equally instructive and interesting—their Claws, Talons, and Feet.

One so often hears the remark—even in this enlightened age—'Was it a web-footed bird that you saw?' and the reply, 'What do you mean by web-footed?' that such an essay as this should be particularly interesting to all those who are unacquainted with the varying constructions of the feet of our feathered pets. When brought together in the manner here set forth a truly astonishing variance is noticeable—so much so that even the author, or the most cultivated Ornithologist, is apt to exclaim, 'Wonderful!'

It is not my intention in this little sketch to attempt to classify or systematise the orders to which the various subjects that I propose to write of, belong, but to treat the matter in a simple and interesting manner, so that all who read, and take notice of my sketches, may understand.

The bird-lover or student would naturally look in an article of this character for the talons of an Eagle of some sort or another, and thus it is that the first and foremost position is given to one of the two Eagles now left to us in this Country—the Golden Eagle. Small wonder is it that this noble ornament of the English landscape is able to carry away, aided by the powerful talons here portrayed, hares, young lambs, rabbits, grouse, and the like. This bold, high-spirited Eagle has even been known to snatch a pig from some hard working labourer's pig-stye, and bear it off to its voracious fledglings, which are generally two in number. Children are often terrified at the thought of an Eagle probably because of the somewhat ex-

aggregated drawings which adorn their picture-books—but their fears are not altogether groundless, for, like the Peregrine



FOOT OF GOLDEN EAGLE.

Falcon, the Golden Eagle is a regular Bull-Dog, and does not stop at trifles. Marvellous indeed are their visionary powers, wonderful the age they attain, and the formidable talons which bear the place of honour here are a study in themselves.

From the Eagle to the useful little Swift—one of the latest of our Summer Visitors and one of the earliest to depart—is a

long journey in the Scientific world, and shews a truly wonderful variance. A glance at my drawing shows that all the four toes are directed forwards, whilst the two middle ones are equal.

This is one of our most useful insectivorous birds, the countless myriads of insects which it destroys during its too short sojourn amongst us being simply amazing.

The Summer evening—when the last red rays of the setting sun are sinking in the West, with the 'Screecher' as the bird is sometimes called, wheeling round and uttering its well known cry and then in



FOOT OF SWIFT.

under the eaves of the Village School—would lose much of its charm without these birds. A peculiarity in regard to it is that owing to the shortness of the tarsi, the bird finds it difficult to get up when once it has alighted on the ground.



LEGS AND FEET OF BLACK-WINGED STILT.

Very correctly named is the Black-Winged Stilt, for its long thin legs certainly do not

misrepresent the stilts we were prone to amuse ourselves with in school days.

All the members of the family to which this bird belongs—to quote the Scientist, the Genus *Himantopus*—are remarkable for the extreme length and slenderness of the legs. Although the bird frequents morasses and the low flat shores of lakes, rivers, and seas, it is not web-footed, but is a wading bird, and its long legs enable it, like the Flamingo, to wade in search of its food without much chance of its being carried out of its depth, but even if this happens, it can swim with great ease and lightness. Gould says that 'when on firm ground, it appears as if tottering on long and awkward stilts, but firm ground is not its congenial habitat.'

The foot of the Brazilian Caracara is built somewhat on the same lines as that of the Golden Eagle, but is more open, and does not possess that 'clenching' which is so apparent in that of the last named variety. The legs are yellow, and the claws black, a perfect and typical example of the foot of a bird of this order. Darwin says in his 'Voyages of the Adventure and Beagle' that he was surprised at the number, tameness and disgusting habits of these birds when he visited the extra tropical parts of South America. He calls them Carrion Hawks—a not inappropriate name by any means—and adds that 'they are pre-eminently striking to anyone accustomed only to the birds of Northern Europe.' It is said that the Carrancha, another name for the bird, is inactive, tame, and cowardly, its flight heavy and slow like our British Rook, and that it is of very versatile habits and considerable ingenuity.



FOOT OF BRAZILIAN CARACARA.

That ever interesting family the Woodpeckers, afford the Natural History Author many opportunities of illustrating the wonders of bird life. The minutest detail in the structure of the Woodpecker admirably fits it for traversing the trunks and branches of trees. The foot is exceedingly strong, the toes are robust and armed with sharp curved claws. I might

enlarge considerably on the wonderful construction of the foot of this interesting and useful bird, but it must suffice to say that the toes can be spread over an extensive area so that the grasp on the tree is more effectual and secure, this being an important factor to the bird whilst ascending the trunk or limbs of trees, and yet more so, while, exerting all its force, it is hammering at the bark or scooping out a hole for its nest. Nature has many wondrous workings!

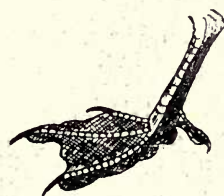
One of the prettiest sights to be seen on the golden-pebbly shore near the sea, is to watch the Terns in their ever graceful movements. Country folk



FOOT OF WOODPECKER.

call these birds Sea-Swallows, others know them as Gulls! I presume the former name is given to them because of their rapid flight, the latter because *all* sea

birds are Gulls to some people. The foot is webbed—the first web-footed bird yet noticed here—the three anterior toes being moderately webbed, but the hind toe is free. We have in the British Isles five members of this interesting family which regularly breed with us. These are the Common, Arctic, Lesser, Sandwich, and last, but not least, the beautiful little Roseate Tern. This latter, however, is becoming rare, a fact which should cause widespread regret. Whether feminine vanity is responsible in a measure for this or not I should not care to say, but I have of late seen several hats containing one of these precious little jewels in the form of a wretched caricature of bird life.



FOOT OF TERN.

The foot of the Grebe—better known as the Dab or Dob-Chick, and in Yorkshire by the name of Tom Puddings—could not possibly be excluded from a sketch of this character. The foot is of a tri-oared description, and the situation of the legs is thrown as far backwards as possible. It is a water bird, a regular lover of the art of natation. Land is not its home; upon it, it is ungainly, and sometimes shuffles along after the manner of a Seal. When diving in pursuit of its prey, it uses

its wings to add to its velocity. The Great Crested and the Little Grebe are the only two of this order which now breed amongst us.

In my essay on Birds' Beaks I pointed out that I could not fail to include the Macaw, and the same remark applies in the present instance. Placed by the side of the bird last dealt with, a very striking diversity will be noticed. It is of course a typical specimen of the foot of the Parrot tribe, and in the language of Scientists it is 'completely zygodactyle and prehensile.' Who has not been interested in 'Polly' as she takes a lump of sugar in one foot and nibbles away at it, using one foot as a hand and the other to stand upon? The feet also aid this bird very materially in climbing. Compare the foot of the Macaw with that of the Grebe or the Tern and the difference will be at once appreciated.



FOOT OF GREBE.



FOOT OF MACAW.

The foot of the beautiful Golden Plover—a British Bird—affords an opportunity of showing a bird possessing toes all directed forwards, and the interesting nature in this respect will be the more apparent when compared with that of another member of this group, namely, the Lapwing, for here it will be observed that the hind toe is much more developed than in the bird last commented upon. This is one of the farmer's friends—although a great many of them do not, or will not, know it. It destroys a great number of worms, insects, larvæ, etc., and yet landowners are foolish enough to encourage the collecting of its eggs, and the shooting of the bird, for market! He gains one way and loses the other—the balance is probably on the adverse side.

In the case of the Rhinoceros Hornbill we have a foot with

the hind toe fully developed, the last three feet I have illustrated affording the non-observant of Nature's workings much wonderment. The structure of the toes and shortness of the tarsi indicates that these birds are of arboreal habits. 'Why should these extraordinary variances exist?' I can hear someone say: 'Why should such diversity be, such amazing variance?' I must refer all such to safer and wiser hands than the Author's for it is a matter that has engaged the close and careful attention of some of the greatest master minds the Scientific world has ever produced.

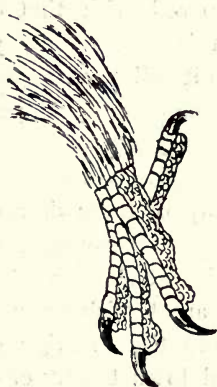


FOOT OF GOLDEN
PLOVER.

The Merganser is another Aquatic bird—the Red Breasted variety is the only one which breeds in our Country. These birds dive and swim with astonishing ease and rapidity, and owing to the remarkable flatness of the body, whilst swimming, they appear as if deeply sunk in the water. Like the Grebes, on land their actions are of an embarrassed order, but the flight is vigorous and strong. It is said that the flesh is rank and disgusting. If, then, it



FOOT OF LAPWING.



FOOT OF RHINOCEROS
HORNBILL.

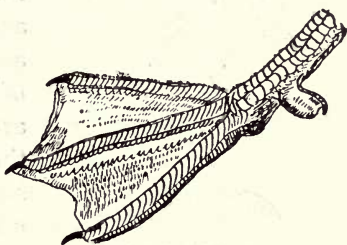
is not as an article of food that the one variety we have with us at the present time has diminished, why is it? Is it *all* to be attributed to the draining of the fens?

The curious looking foot of the Eurylaimus is well worth hanging in this Bird Gallery. The Javanese Eurylaimus is a native of Java—as the first part of its name implies—and Sumatra. It resorts to huge forests where rivers and marshes abound, and its food consists of insects and worms. It is not recorded, so far as I can ascertain, that its foot aids it in any way particularly,

though the structure of it suggests that it is found extremely useful in digging for

'The worms that crawl on the lowly earth'.

The Tree Pipit—one of the charming Summer visitors to our shores which gladdens us with its trilling lays—is a near relative of Shelley's favourite Lark, and it possesses a foot which is a fair illustration of the feet of the birds belonging to this order. It is a delightful songster, far out-shining its congener the Meadow Pipit, and is one of our most pleasing harbingers of Summer. Whether or not the curiously



FOOT OF MERGANSER.



FOOT OF EURYLAIMUS.

shaped foot of the Nightjar accounts for the bird's strange habit of sitting on the branch of a tree lengthwise I cannot say with certainty, but it is a fact worth noticing. I have illustrated the complete foot and also the pectinated claw, which is but one of the many peculiarities belonging to this most useful member of the

feathered race. It is persecuted because of the ridiculous name by which it is called in some localities—Night Hawk—but there is not a more beneficial bird which favours us with its welcome presence during the English Summer. One thing in the bird's favour is that it does not come out much until the blinking, snoozing Owls are just waking up, and the daytime of the Bat is just commencing.



FOOT OF TREE PIPIT.

That fine and noble bird, the Ostrich, owns a foot which will be extremely interesting and instructive. Two toes only does it possess, but they are stout and strong; of these the innermost is much larger than the outer, and is furnished with a hoof-like

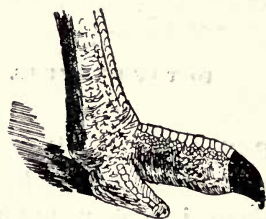
claw, the outer toe being clawless. The carrying powers of the Ostrich are well known, also the commercial use of its feathers, but it may not generally be known that it can kick as hard as a mule, and that its kick is always in a forward direction.



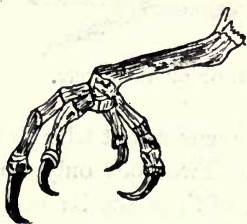
FOOT OF NIGHTJAR AND
PECTINATED CLAW ON MIDDLE TOE.

From the foot of the Ostrich to that of the Toucan is a far cry, and the two examined closely present a divergence which every true admirer of Nature must enjoy. These birds are noticeable perhaps because of their extraordinary beaks, and the smallness of the foot in comparison certainly causes wonderment and surprise.

The foot of the Rhea Bird is well worth inclusion in view of the fact that it possesses one more toe than the Ostrich, although a bird of somewhat similar structure. The middle toe is much the largest, and all three are armed with stout claws. The plumes of this bird are imported into England in a similar manner to those of the Ostrich, and may often be seen fixed in a handle, so as to form light and delicate dusting brushes. The bird is about five feet high; it is shy, wary and fleet, and it prefers to run against the wind.



FOOT OF OSTRICH.



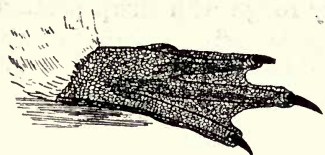
FOOT OF TOUCAN.

The King Penguin's foot is remarkable, and a close study of it will repay the reader. A sharp claw exists in the place of a hind toe. Travellers tell me that they have waded through thousands of these birds—in the Falkland Islands if my memory serves me correctly—and have seen them knocked down wholesale. The grotesqueness of the birds is amusing

and comical, so they say, but for all that it is a noble looking bird, and a formidable one. The Hon. Walter Rothschild showed me some marvellous specimens of both the bird whose foot I have illustrated, and the Emperor, which he has located in his wonderful collection at Tring Park. One member of this family, is called the Jackass Penguin, a name that will be appreciated when my remarks as to the strange attitudes the bird throws off are understood.



FOOT OF RHEA.

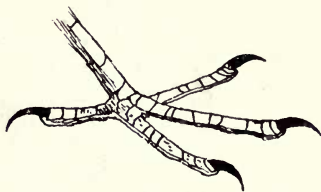


FOOT OF KING PENGUIN.

The mimicing, chattering Starling is worthy of a place in the concluding stages of this article, if, for no other reason, because of its usefulness to man, though its foot is of so simple a character that, placed side by side with some of the nobler examples I have dealt with, variance is noticeable of a very interesting description. But just a word on its behalf as a boon to the Agriculturist and the Horticulturist. A single pair of these birds will get rid of more than 12,000 grubs in 4 months, and most destructive grubs too! He tries hard to sing, indeed possesses the art of mimicry in a marked degree. One I had in my possession imitated the Cuckoo, Woodpecker and Duck to perfection but, alas, poor 'Nigger' has now gone over to the great majority.

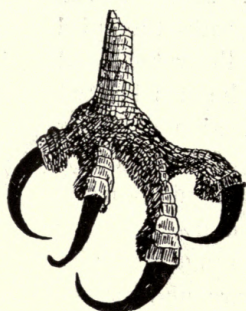
The last bird on my list is the Osprey, or Fishing Hawk. A truly wonderful foot does it possess, which it uses to great advantage in its fishing exploits.

A few pairs still breed in the British Isles, but the bird is becoming very scarce, another reason for wonderment, unless it is to be attributed to the eagerness of Collectors who hunt



FOOT OF STARLING.

it to the death? It is said to proceed deep enough into the sea as to disappear for an instant, when it plunges in pursuit



FOOT OF OSPREY.

of fish. The claws are large, much curved, equal, and rounded underneath; under surface of toes very rough with sharp pointed scales.

DECEMBER.



A WINTER SCENE.

NATURE IN DECEMBER.

WHEN we in the South of England do have snow, one of the most interesting sights I always think is to watch a cock Pheasant proudly strutting in the beautiful crisp substance, and then, having walked up to the spot, observing his well defined foot marks; or to watch a dozen or more Rabbits frolicking about, and seeming to delight in the Wintry surroundings.

Did ever the sooty Blackbird or the red breasted Robin—and we must not forget the speckled Thrush—look better or show off their plumage to more perfection than when seen on a ground of snow? Winter in the South of England, however, is nowadays of such a mild character that one cannot with any degree of certainty devote too much space to a hard Winter in such a sketch as December. On Christmas Day 1898, for instance, I knew of a nest of young Thrushes in Kent, and many like records were sent to the Press, and were in most cases well authenticated. No matter whether hard or mild, in December the Nature lover realizes that all is silently preparing for the Spring. Brush aside with your stick the snow along a hedgerow for a square yard and you will be able to discern the fresh green buds, only waiting for the sun to melt the snow, then a few weeks of nice warm weather, and the Spring is not far distant.

December is an excellent month to study the various Lichens which abound in England; seen through a magnifying glass, and no less so with the naked eye, their silver and golden colours, lilacs, whites and greys, are indeed beautiful to look upon. Supposing the snow is on the ground there are three birds still singing in the Robin, Wren and Skylark. All three birds appear to be cheered by the transient gleam, and why should they not be, for is not this the season of good cheer?

Individuals at this season let bygones be bygones, forget all old troubles and short-comings and wish one another the

compliments of the season. The rugged and rough old farm hand who may be ditching or hedging stops as we pass him to raise his hand to his forehead and wish us a Merry Christmas and Bright New Year. When one rambles along the country side these little episodes are very pleasing and well timed, they give an outsider an excellent insight into the manners and customs of our land, and these little chats by the wayside are looked for and encouraged by the keen observer, who is never happy unless he is out and about.

Early in April it is my invariable custom to seek for some tiller of the soil to ask for the latest information as to the Cuckoo or some other Summer visitor; in December I ask the more seasonable question as to whether the Fieldfares or the Redwings are very plentiful this Winter; whether that flock of Snow Buntings that visited the district last year have again made their appearance; whether those flocks of Geese have been seen or heard lately, and so on. And, moreover, these old country rustics are very intelligent fellows on matters Ornithological, they remember such and such a rare bird visiting the district during the terrible Winter of so many years ago; they remember that it was in such a year the locality was visited by a large flock of Crossbills, one or two Little Auks and other sea birds--although we may be far inland.

A sharp, brisk walk in December--with the hard frozen ground as clean as a well scrubbed kitchen table--is delightful. The birds are very tame, and one is enabled to get a much closer inspection of all living creatures, if we except the wary Fox, but even he in hard weather suffers the observer to get to rather close quarters.

Towards the middle of the month we pass along the country road, and meet people carrying huge bundles of Holly, Ivy, Laurels and other Evergreens for decorative purposes. We visit the Parish Church, or the Village Schoolroom, and observe that Christmas decorations are well in hand. The Squire's wife is there and the Vicar's daughter, the Schoolmistress, and Miss So and So from the Manse. How busy they are and how deft is their handiwork! If the Winter is severe we notice that the birds keep pretty close together for warmth, but cold



THE BADGER'S HAUNT. No. 1.

we believe does not kill birds so much as hunger. Even if the lake be frozen the various Water Fowl do not appear to feel the cold; they lazily squat on the ice, then waddle off into the water where the ice is kept clear for them.

The common Shield Fern is beautiful in December, the run of the Hare is easily discernible, and we may come across a Hedgehog rolled up in a ditch like a ball of leaves. The Hart's Tongue Fern too is out nicely now, and a few Blackberries are



A FLIGHT OF WILD DUCKS.

still to be seen, but the various berries are disappearing rapidly. The Winter visitors from Norway make sad havoc amongst the Mountain Ash berries.

The Mole has to go deeper in the ground now, and the Owls get as far as they can into the hollow trees. Watching the sprightly Wagtails by the side of some stream is very interesting just now, and the same remark applies to the various Buntings in the farmyard. They are very partial to a grain diet during the Winter.

The Nuthatches and Tree Creepers join company with them very often, and do not resent being partnered by the Titmice.

An old Carrion Crow is seen dibbing about in the field skirting the wood. Just watch his antics through your field-glass, see how strong and to what good purpose he uses that massive bill of his, and how untiring are his efforts to get a fill out of the hard ground. How the grey old church tower stands out in the distance with the climbing ivy all around it. The birds shelter here during the cold nights, and have to pay the penalty when the clap nets come along, a remark which also applies to the stacks in the farmyard.

Provided that the weather is open, the December Moth comes out from a smooth brown chrysalis. One may watch the Leeches and other insects in some clear stream too if the weather is congenial, and a fine old Pike lying just above the river bed of fallen Autumn leaves does not escape the searching eye of the Naturalist. Passing by an orchard one may see the Mistletoe. Birds are responsible for the propagation of this parasitic shrub in many districts for they eat the berries, and these passing uninjured through the alimentary canal results in the Mistletoe springing up in very unlooked-for localities.

In the kitchen garden a nice patch of green stuff catches the eye, and we may observe the Death Watch Beetle, and in the flower garden the Christmas Rose. How lovely a white frost, how changeable is Nature! One day it is muggy and desolate, the next, one wakes to find the country around clothed in a spotless garb of glistening white. What exquisite festoons and what delicate net-work! A Chaffinch alights on the bough above us and scatters soft flakes through the cold, crisp air.

Across the air comes the drumming of the Snipe, whilst the Devil's Coach Horse Beetle may perhaps be lighted upon as we are turning out some pots in the garden. One cannot help noticing even in severe weather that very few birds are found dead by the wayside. This raises the question as to how do wild birds die? Many no doubt when taken ill resort to the woods and thickets and pass their last moments on earth in solitude, then drop to the ground to be eaten by some Crow or other carrion eater.



THE BADGER'S HAUNT. No. 2.

How the ricks stand out in the landscape when they are covered with snow, appearing like huge snow stacks in the distance.

Having passed the shortest day and the longest night, the Nature lover begins to look forward to the budding Spring again.

One of the finest evergreens just now is the Sweet Bay tree, and as we stand gazing at a fine old tree which has snapped off and left the trunk a mere wreck, we remark to our companion that the Goat Moth is responsible for the fall of it.

The haunt of the Badger is admirably illustrated in the two photographs Mr. Newman has taken, and further comment is needless. How we can watch the Green Woodpecker now! When the foliage was on the trees we soon lost him as he darted through the woodland glade, but now we can observe him for some considerable distance. With a field-glass we may see his beautiful red head and various green plumes. What a fine fellow he is. His two relations the Great and Lesser Spotted varieties must not be overlooked, for both of them are well worth a careful study.

The glittering silver shells of Fresh Water Mussels by the side of some inland lake attract our attention, and all too soon darkness sets in, and we are pleased to have a chat round the cosy parlour fire.

Thus our year with Nature comes to an end. It has been a difficult matter to do justice to the Natural History of the Months, for it is a wide field and there must be some limit.

We have not rambled so much by the sea-shore to watch and describe the sea birds in their myriads our rambles have mostly been in the Southern and Midland Counties, and we have described, feeble though the descriptions may be, actual sights and sounds which we ourselves have seen and heard and participated in. We have not sat in our study and pictured things in the mind, these sketches have been written mostly on the spot, so that we do not think we have gone far wrong.

What short-comings and omissions there may be are to a certain extent pardonable, we have catered for the ordinary public and not for Scientists; we have been mindful rather

of the popular reader, and it is to him we look for any appreciation which is our due. Where the pen has failed to convey an impression we hope the camera will convince and enlighten.

Even at this season we dwell in happy memory on the past, when

‘The Cuckoo told his name to all the hills;
The mellow Ouzel fluted in the elm;
The Redcap whistled; and the Nightingale
Sang loud, as tho’ he were the bird of day.’

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The following is a list of the Plates:—

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>"The Roseate Tern" (<i>Sterna Dougalli</i>) Montagu
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Arctic Tern" (<i>Sterna macrura</i>) Naumann
 (Males, Female, Nests, Eggs, and Young.)</p> <p>"The Ring-Ouzel" (<i>Turdus torquatus</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Stonechat" (<i>Pratincola rubicola</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Redbreast" (<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"Golden-Crested Wren" (<i>Regulus cristatus</i>) K. L. Koch
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"Long Tailed Titmouse" (<i>Acredula caudata</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Great Titmouse" (<i>Parus major</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Tree-Creeper" (<i>Certhia familiaris</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Swallow" (<i>Hirundo rustica</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The House-Martin" (<i>Chelidon urbica</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Chaffinch" (<i>Fringilla cælebs</i>) Linnæus
 (Male, Female, Nest, and Eggs.)</p> <p>"The Hawfinch" (<i>Coccothraustes vulgaris</i>) Pallas
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